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THIS BOOK IS
DEDICATED TO
THE BHAKTAS
OF BRAJA
KRISHNA'S PLAYGROUND

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INTRODUCTION

On May 12, 1978 thousands of people all over India participated in the five hundredth appearance day celebration of Suradas. Although Suradas is the best known of the Ashta Chhap poets even he is relatively unknown to the Western world. The Ashta Chhap poets were the eight devotional bards who sang before Shri Nathji (Shri Krishna) on top of the Govardhan Hill, 12 miles from the sacred city of Vrindavan. Suradas, Paramanandadas, Kumbhanadas, and Krishnadas were the disciples of the great 16th century founder of the Path of Grace, Shri Vallabhacharya, the last of the four great Vaishnava Acharyas. Ramunaja, Madhva, and Nimbarka preceded him. The other four poets, Nandadas, Govindasvami, Chitasvami, and Chatrabhujadas were all the disciples of Shri Vallabhacharya's son, Shri Vitthalnathji. They all flourished during the climax of the Indian spiritual renaissance which played host to other great souls within the Krishna devotional sphere like Mirabai, Shri Chaitanya, Haridas Svami and many others.

The life and songs of these eight Krishna saint poets is the material for this present book. Its original text is in Braja Bhasha, the mystic language of India, from which in part modern Hindi has emerged. Suradas, Paramanandadas, Kumbhanadas, and Krishnadas' stories were taken from the 84 Vaishnava text (please refer to my introduction in the 84 Vaishnavas) while the accounts of Nandadas, Chitasvami, Govindasvami and Chatrabhujadas were taken from the 252 Vaishnava Stories of Shri Vitthalnathji's disciples, a text also

in Braja Bhasha compiled by Shri Vallabhacharya's grandson Shri Gokulnathji. To my knowledge this is the first time that these stories and poems have been translated into English.

These eight poets comprise much of the finest Krishna poetry that was ever written in Braja Bhasha. Of course there were many other fine Krishna poets of that era like Hit Hari-vams, Svami Haridas, Shri Bhatt, Mirabai and others representing many different lineages but the Ashta Chhap poets represent an unmatched group of god-brothers appearing within a generation of each other who composed several oceans of unprecedented devotional works. Because they were all initiated either by Shri Vallabhacharya or his son Shri Vitthalnathji, there are certain similarities but each of the poets expresses a very unique relationship with Shri Krishna.

Although Suradas is the best known of the poets, I would not venture to say that he is necessarily in all respects the best of the eight poets. Truly, it is impossible to rate this sort of divinity. Suradas has covered the broadest scope in his poetry singing about Krishna's infant and childhood lilas, His youthful lilas, as well as about Lord Rama and other pastimes that are related in the Bhagavata. He has written extensively on the nature of renunciation and the various different aspects of Krishna's lila. Because of the vastness of his literary accomplishments, Shri Vallabhacharya called him an ocean. His works are mostly comprised within the Sura Sagar, The Ocean of Sur. Many of his poems describe the infant sports of Krishna but in works like the "Man Sagar" the amorous lilas of Radha Krishna are revealed. Sur sings :

Loving Krishaa and the amorous Radha
are under the reign of fresh love.
The Lord of life
and the beloved of life
share each other's breath.

Here the wise Krishna,
there the clever Radha
both great adepts of love.

To please Krishna fully
Radha relinquishes
her anger in love
and offers him delight.

Whoever sings of the astonishing lila
of Radha Krishna
is blissful and will never be born
from a sinful womb.
Such a person lives in the proximity of Krishna
and finds the fearless state,
heart filling with ever-expanding bliss.

Sings Sur :

"Those who daily praise Krishna's lilas
are liberated."

A question arises from which mood did Sur really sing. In the case of Kumbhanadas and Chatrabhujadas it is clear that their devotional attitude was centered around the amorous aspects of Shri Krishna but when you review the poems of Sur or even Paramanandadas who have praised Shri Krishna in so many different aspects it becomes difficult to speculate. Intimate love flourishes throughout their works and for this reason even in poems in praise to the Infant Krishna, we see Him enchanting the hearts of young women. Krishna can perfectly maintain all contradictions.

The beautiful Shyam
swings in the cradle.
From head to toe
exquisitely ornamented
His splendour enticing
billions of love gods.
Ogging Krishna
the lovely Braja maidens

congregate in pairs

Suradas sings :

"Mother Yashoda swings infant Krishna
in his cradle."

When the Lord is the father there is a sense of authority which can generate the mood of fear. When the Supreme becomes the son a tender concern emerges, a lightness in the divine relationship which Sur has captured in so many of his poems :

Krishna has a little face
and little feet
and on his little hand
there is a little butter.
He has little lips,
and with his little laugh
he steals everyone's heart.

Little cheeks
a little brow
and wears little clothes
and little ornaments.

Sur prays
to a little little crawling Krishna :
"shower a little grace
and shelter me."

Krishna can be little, He can even steal butter or the cloths of the Gopis and can still remain divine. Suradas' devotion is filled with such divine mundane plays. Although his devotion is directed totally towards Shri Krishna, when he was about to pass on to the eternal lila he revealed his deep commitment to his guru, Shri Vallabhacharya who opened his eyes to the lila when he lauds his teacher :

In his sacred feet
have your faith's firm seat.

Then meditating upon the Divine Couple he sang the following song before leaving his material body :

Nectar maddened Khanjan bird eyes.
With such quickness they dart
in a wonderful way
for engaged in an eyewink they will not stay.

Time and again they fly out to each ear
to return from the nose-like earring so near.

Held by the kohl there they stay
If not, says Sur, they would fly away.

Paramanandadas' works were collected into a volume called the Ocean of Paramanandadas. I find Paramanandadas to be consistently the most inspired poet. After Suradas, perhaps he is the best known of the Ashta Chhap poets but is virtually unheard of in the West. Like Suradas, he had a following of his own before becoming the disciple of Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya and was hailed as a great poet and singer. All of the Eight Poets cherished deep feeling of humility and Paramanandadas has expressed this mood as well as any poet in a number of his poems :

This I ask of you Krishna :
To have constant love for your lotus feet
and to enjoy the gathering of the 'bhaktas'.

Give me residence at Vrindavan
on the banks of the Yamuna.

To listen to the nectar of Krishna's stories
and to meditate upon the body of Shyam.

To have all the wishes of my heart fulfilled
and to bathe in Yamunaji's pure water.

Paramanandadas's Krishna
is the hero of Gokul and in every way enduring.

Paramanandadas used to listen to Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's discourses on the Srimad Bhagavata and composed works that were in accordance with those teachings. His expressions were not just dry repetitions of doctrine but were the extracted essence of devotional mood. His poems about the Divine Couple, Their lila, and how it appears in the world are totally unique :

Upon seeing Shri Radha's full moon face
the ocean of bliss swells in Krishna's body
and overflows into Braja and Vrindavan.

There it is stopped by the Yamuna river
here by the Gopis.

A little is spread throughout the three world
It does not touch practitioners
of the Path of work and knowledge,
but stays inside the hearts
of those who savor the highest mood.

For 'bhaktas' every moment
'lila' leisurely immerses their adept minds.

By the grace of Nanda's son
a little of the flow
is seen in those with
Paramananda.

It is a common practice amongst the Ashta Chhap and other Indian poets to mention their name at the end of the poem. Sometimes it is merely a signature, but in the case of the above mentioned poem, Paramananda is not only the poet's name but here is ment to be the name of Krishna which means Supreme Bliss.

The most original poet in my eyes is Nandadas. He has an uncanny way with words. His poems are filled with the

most wonderful metaphors. I have heard it said that all the other Ashta Chhap poets are 'jhariyas' that is jewelers who make the setting for the stone, while Nandadas is the 'ghariya' the one who sets the jewel. In his story we do not find many of his poems. To understand more of his heart I have given below some from his Rupa Manjari, a very long poem in which he reveals how Rupa Manjari with the help of Nandadas who appears in the poem as Indumati finds the Immortal Love, Shri Krishna. He starts the Rupa Manjari :

First I bow to the love-filled Lord
whose splendour is great
and form pure,
a treasure of beauty
forever praised by the poet.

Nandadas explains according to his ability
the one supreme path of love.

Whoever hears of its attributes
is delighted at heart
for the sweet mood alone
can reach substance.

Without the touch of mood,
the essence is not known.

Who besides the black bee
can know the lotus ?

(He goes on to explain the exquisite beauty of
Rupa Manjari)

The girl's blossoming youth
like the flame into which the moth descends,
catches the eyes of men and women.

The unsteadiness of
Rupa Manjari's childhood feet
has so wonderfully entered her eyes.

Here and there her love-filled glances
wander eagerly
chattering with her ears.
His text is filled with jewels like.

It's fine to have a shrewd adversary,
but a stupid friend is one's real enemy.

Rupa Manjari's heart was a magnifying glass,
her body, a cotton wick dipped in ghee.

When the rays of her lover shined
into her heart
her body burst into flames.

Nandadas' poems, or any of the Ashta Chhap's works
which may seem to the unknowing like they are describing
some worldly love play should listen closely to Nandadas'
words :

"This story is filled with divine mood
and Nandadas has created it
for his own purpose.

Those who listen and recite it for Him
find the most exalted position of love.

Even if the scriptures say
"He is most unattainable"
from pure love
one can come
exceedingly close to God.

This union is not found in talking
but in undertaking.

A lamp shines not by discussion,
but only when it is lit.

Nandadas has written a number of wonderful works. His
Bhramar Gita, which is a Braja Bhasa adaptation of the origi-
nal Sanskrit text, is better than the original. The works of
Nandadas are deep and filled with unexpected wonders.

Kumbhanadas and his son Chatrabhujadas were both
native of the Govardhan Hill and experienced Shri Krishna's
pastimes from their childhood, Chatrabhujadas from when he
was an infant. Unlike Suradas, Paramanandadas, and Govinda-
svami, who had their own following before becoming the
disciples of Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, Kumbhanadas
and his son were simple Brajavasis, residents of Braja who
survived on the grains in the fields and the berries that grew
on their trees. Kumbhanadas was totally immersed in Shri
Radha-Krishna's intimate play. He never sang about renunci-
ation, or even Krishna's infant play. This shows that Shri
Vallabhacharya did direct his disciples to worship the youthful
forms of Shri Svaminiji and Shri Krishna, something which
many previous writers have overlooked. Kumbhanadas' 'bhava'
or feeling for the Divine Couple was so strong that he would
never leave the Govardhan Hill, the area of their intimate play
to even venture to Gokul, the sacred spot of Krishna's Infant
pastimes, just 12 miles away. Although Kumbhanadas experi-
enced Shri Krishna and the bower 'lila' he requested Shri
Nathji that he desired to have some good association with
other devotees. To fulfil his wish, his son Chatrabhujadas was
born who from his infancy would talk to him about the inti-
mate pastimes of the Divine Couple. When someone else
walked into the room when they were sharing their experiences
of the divine lila, Chatrabhujadas would instantly appear like
an ordinary infant. Chatrabhujadas, following in the mood
of his father sang largely about the celestial bower but did
travel to Gokul, the place of Krishna's childhood lilas and
composed poems about Krishna's childhood pastimes as well.

In their accounts the attributes of being the Lord's friend
is clearly revealed. Shri Nathji engages Kumbhanadas in a
cooking contest and then goes out to steal curds and butter
with Chatrabhujadas. What makes Shri Krishna an Avatari,
that is the Primal Lord as opposed to His various incarnations

like Buddha, Vyasa, or Vamana is that he can be approached through any sentiment. When king Kamsa achieved Him by fearing Him, it is not surprising that he can be grasped through the sentiment of friendship or love both of which are revealed in the accounts of Kumbhanadas and his son. They even sang poems together when they had a common experience of the lila. Once Kumbhanadas began a poem :

Look at the light in the window
There Hari rests
in the lofty room
filled with love paintings.

Chatrabhujadas then sang :
Beloved Krishna makes great efforts
to behold her fair face.

Kumbhanadas then finished the poem,
He puts his arms around her neck,
thrills her with the nectar of His lips
Her mind and heart merged
with the love of her life.

Her fresh form, beautiful
filled with great splendor.
Says Kumbhanadas:
"Krishna's fortune has climaxed.
The couple join into one essence,
the new lovely wise Radha
with the young lad
who held the mountain."

Of the eight poets, there were the only two who maintained a farming livelihood and household as well as engaged themselves in singing at the temple. Amidst all that, they were able to become completely addicted to Krishna, the fruit of the devotional experience. Kumbhanadas exemplifies this mood

best when Shri Gusainji tried to take him away from the Govardhan hill on a pilgrimage to Gujarat. Although he was away from Shri Nathji and the temple for only a few hours he felt intense separation from his Lord and sang :

How many days have passed without seeing
that young lad, the amorous son of Nanda.
Mourns Kumbhanadas, without Krishna
my life is worthless.

Perhaps the most difficult to understand of the eight poets is Krishnadas, a low caste Sudra from Gujarat. Besides being a poet, he was the manager of Shri Nathji temple, a post his guru Shri Vallabhacharya bestowed upon him. His poetic contributions are mostly centered about the 'rasa lila' the celebrated dance between Shri Krishna and His beloved souls in the bowers of Vrindavan, near the dark waters of the Yamuna river cooled by the autumn rays of the full moon. He appears to be quite arrogant at several times during the account, but anyone who can experience and sing the praises of Krishna's lila is ultimately absolved from all impurities. Shri Vallabhacharya explains :

"When the Lord appears upon the earth He becomes the fruit for divine souls according to His different types of manifestations. Sometimes when the soul becomes attached to the false world or has a false sense of pride, in order to manifest the Path of Grace, He makes these divine souls appear in the world for purification, but they are not plagued by hypocrisy, disease or affliction."

It is revealed that whatever happened to Krishnadas here was all part of the divine play and he appeared upon the earth to fulfil a particular part in the drama of creation and his inspired devotional work testify to his elevated position in that lila. His poems depicting the 'rasa lila' are the finest on that particular subject :

Krishna is the moon
the Gopis the stars
as they merge
in the dance of rasa.

Krishna's beaming face
illuminates Shri Vrindavan
affording young women bliss
His lotus eyes, delightful, enchanting,
steal the hearts of the Gokul maidens.

The lover and the beloved dance
their lotus hands hold blossomed flowers.
She is filled with the mood of 'rasa'.
Krishna is most becoming.
Krishnadas' Lord is the Mountain Holder,
a prince among appreciators.

Chitasvami, a Brahmin from Mathura, also within the
area of Braja, the realm where Krishna grazed his cow is the
author of some wonderful poems like :

Ahead of him cows
In back of Him cows
Here there are cows
there there are cows
Govinda likes to be
all around his cows.

He runs with His cows
He is content with His cows,
and for His cows
He held up the Govardhan Hill.

The dust of the cows
covers the land of Braja
so beautiful that it makes you

forget about the celestial realms
Chitasvami says that
Shri Vitthalnathji is Krishna
who has appeared in human form
in the guise of a cowlad
and is coming from the forest
with all His cows.

In each of his poems he pays respect to his guru Shri
Vitthalnathji although he has not written as much as some of
the other poets, there are many jewels among his works.

Govindadas or Govinda Svami, as he is sometimes called,
is what they call in Braja Bhasa 'must' which can be loosely
translated as being divinely intoxicated and not particularly con-
cerned about anything else except Shri Krishna's essence. He is
the author of many poems that are sung in the evening raga
which depict the evening plays of Shri Radha Krishna but is also
known to play during the day with Shri Krishna in the area
around the Govardhan hill. Perhaps there are no accounts
which reveal a playful relationship as is seen in Govinda Svamis'
story. Govinda Svami would act as Shri Krishna's horse and
carry the Lord around the Govardhan Hill area and climb trees
with Him between the morning and afternoon periods of wor-
ship or even have pebble fights with the Lord in the temple but
during the evening would reveal the intimate plays of Radha-
Krishna. Within his 'varta' there are not many poems given,
but the following poem is an example of his devotional well-
spring. His poetry is rich in description of Krishna's form :

His pretty eyes are
intoxicated with the spirit of youth.

Beauty surges from
his unsteady vacillating eyebrows,
a smile adorns His face.

He is always filled for His bhatakas
with grace's nectar.

He blooms like a lotus flower.
Sings Govindadas,
"That splendorous countenance
I imbibe without satiety."

It is only possible to give a glimpse into the devotional contributions within this short introduction; even the original text can only begin to reveal their magical realities. They all lived during a remarkable time in a very divine place.

While Shri Vallabhacharya was pilgrimaging in the South of India, Shri Krishna appeared to him and said that He had appeared on top of the Govardhan Hill in the Vrindavan area in the North of India and that he should proceed there to establish His worship. Arriving there he set up Shri Nathji's (Shri Krishna's) divine worship, (See the account of Sadu Pande in the 84 Vaishnavas) and many of the local people became Shri Vallabhacharya's disciples. Shri Nathji told the guru, "Make my worship famous."

Shri Vallabhacharya did not stay there very long but established a mode of divine worship in which Shri Nathji was adorned and offered foodstuffs everyday and Suradas became the first official temple singer. This worship was further embellished by Shri Vitthalnathji. The divine worship was offered to Shri Nathji eight different times of the day; 'Mangala', when the Lord is awoken, 'Shringar' when Shri Nathji is adorned, 'Gopijan Vallabh' occurs after the Lord is adorned but before lunch or 'Raja Bhog'. Then after an afternoon rest, Shri Nathji is awoken for the period of Uttapan and then brought foodstuffs by the Gopis and other 'bhaktas' on His way home from the forest during the 'Bhog' period and finally offered dinner which is called 'Sen'. This divine worship supports infinite varieties of devotional appreciation. The Ashta Chhap poets all sang in Shri Nathji's temple for these eight different periods of worship and for this reason much of their poetry depicts a day in the life of Shri Krishna, His playing with his friends, love sports with the Gopis, and the descriptions of Krishna's lila with his mother Yashoda.

There are praises sung about Him getting up in the morning, bathing and eating as well as poems of supplication to Shri Krishna and the guru in which the poets reveal the greatness of the Lord, guru and fellow practitioners. These poems were sung in different ragas, or musical melodies which vary from season to season as well as for the different times of the day. This style of poetry is called 'lila kirtan' that is praises offered to Shri Krishna which depicts the lila play.

The Ashta Chhap's poetry was a devotional expression for their personal experience with the Lord and it fueled their devotion. Although it is said in the Vedas that He is ineffable, they capture essence in words through the power of love. You can study their poems in a technical manner, but to grasp their quality of enlightenment, one has to be susceptible to 'lila', the divine eternal sport of Shri Krishna. We could believe the lilas which they describe to be born from imagination, but then we would miss the essence of what they were singing about. In Sanskrit there are three concepts which dispel the differences between what the Ashta Chhap poets wrote, what other somewhat inspired poets composed, and the writings of the worldly poets.

The worldly poets create from the power of 'kalpana' or imagination which is based on the speculative mind. For instance, a poet may write that Radha-Krishna are as beautiful as one billion love gods, but if he has not seen that wonder, or even felt it within the depths of his heart it remains in the realm of 'kalpana'. It does not carry within it a drop of Their nectar; such works can misrepresent the Divine Couple as being mundane.

Semi-inspired poets create from 'bhavana'. This word has no clear English translation but we can say that 'bhavana' is a sentiment that has been revealed either in the scriptures or in the works and writing of realized beings that is felt by the writer but is yet to be actualized. If the heart feels that Radha-Krishna are as beautiful as a billion love gods but that vision has not yet manifested before the eyes, that level of devotion

falls within the sphere of 'bhavana'. Poetry that is created from 'bhavana' contains some drops of nectar.

'Bhava' or as some people say 'svanubhava' occurs when there is full comprehension and experience of the subject matter. In that state, Shri Radha-Krishna's beauty is actually beheld, it is witnessed directly. Any creation that is manifested in this realm can carry the experience with it and can inspire others. The Ashta Chhap poets are all within the realm of 'bhava'; their writings are testimonies to what they experienced. They did not go home and write poems to sing before Shri Nathji on the following day. When they were in the temple before Shri Nathji they witnessed the 'lila' and sang about what they saw. Once when Govinda Svami was singing before Shri Nathji he stopped in the middle of the composition and his guru, Shri Vitthalnathji questioned: "Why did you stop singing?" The bhakta replied, "Krishna ran away, now, who is there to sing about."

Poems that are created from 'bhava' are like mantras, they underlie the import of scripture and when sung in pure mood, can evoke the 'bhava' from which they were conceived. To this day these poems are sung by some rare souls who are able to penetrate into the depths of their writings and witness what these poets experienced some 500 years ago. Krishna lila is not only a historical phenomena which occurred with the advent of Shri Krishna 5000 years ago, or even during the time of Shri Vallabhacharya, but a timeless reality that can be experienced within any time zone. The Ashta Chhap poems are mantras, their seeds are in the eternal lila. I have heard it said that the best spiritual practice is to sing the Ashta Chhap poets. The Bhagavata is the ripened fruit of all scriptural knowledge, but the songs of the Ashta Chhap are the refined essence.

Although this is not the place to go into depth on how the poems of the Ashta Chhap fit into the galaxy of Indian thought it should be mentioned that their attention is upon the Lord's highest spiritual playground, Vrindavan, or it is some-

times called Goloka or by a number of different names. It exists beyond the realm of pure light. It is known only through the grace of God. Within that realm, Shri Krishna sports eternally with his favoured souls. What is so unusual about the Ashta Chhap is that instead of going to that lofty abode, Krishna condescended to bring that perfect reality to them and it manifested for the duration of their devotional lives by the Govardhan Hill and within Shri Nathji's temple. This is considered the ultimate state, to dance with Shri Krishna within the world. How they danced is the subject of this text.

This supremely divine essence, even the personified lines of the holy Veda were unaware of and confused by what seemed to be a contradiction between whether the Supreme has a form or not, they prayed that their confusion be resolved. Shri Krishna, pleased with their sincere request, granted them the sight of His supreme realm, Shri Vrindavan. Enraptured by the vision, they requested to be a part of that 'lila' which ever increases in bliss, is devoid of all fatigue and is a congregation of the highest moods. The Lord agreed and said that when He would appear as Krishna, they would appear as the Gopis of Vrindavan and then, they too would be able to enjoy the bliss which they had been praising for eons without actually being fully conscious of It.

As the Gopis manifested during the advent of Shri Krishna some five thousand years ago, five hundred years ago when Shri Vallabhacharya incarnated upon the earth, the Ashta Chhap were born to play with Shri Nathji who appeared during those days to grant his devotees bliss. It is said that during the times of Shri Girdharji, Shri Vallabhacharya's grandson, Shri Nathji stopped playing with devotees in an open manner like He did during the blessed days of the Ashta Chhap for most souls lost that blessed spiritual qualification.

The Lord can either be worshipped in a transcendental form which can not be experienced within the realm of matter, or as a mundane God, that is when the Supreme agrees to play with chosen souls here within the world. When Krishna played

his flute in the forest of Vrindavan during the cool autumn nights, many Gopis or dairy maids of Braja heard His calling and leaving everything which they were doing headed out in the direction towards the divine melody. Other Gopis, who heard the calling were unable to leave their homes because they were stopped by their husbands and other relatives. Because they were not able to join in the dance with Shri Krishna here in this world, they left their bodies and achieved Him through meditation. They found the transcendental Krishna while the Gopis who were able to leave their homes and dance with the immortal Lord in the groves of Vrindavan were the most blessed. Those Gopis who achieved the transcendental Lord without being able to dance with the immortal mundane Krishna did not have as high a spiritual qualification as the Gopis who were able to join him in the forest.

The Ashta Chhap poet's Krishna, although pure Brahman, was mundane in the fact that He allowed them to experience His transcendental realm within mundane spheres and this was the fruit of having senses; to see Shri Nathji, to touch Shri Nathji, to sing to Shri Nathji, to be His friend and lover. Shri Krishna brought Sura water when he was thirsty, threw pebbles at Govindadas, stole dairy products with Chatrabhujadas and participated in a cooking contest with Kumbhanadas. Through these and other lilas their worldly existence became thoroughly divine. Their love for Krishna was not conditioned by fear, nor in the stage of fulfilment did their devotion depend upon even knowing Krishna's greatness. There were no philosophical problems for them concerning the nature of the Supreme reality, it was experienced. There was no dualism, nor monism nor anything besides Krishna. All philosophical contradictions were resolved in the abode of sweetness. Everything was purely Krishna and only Shri Krishna could contain the endless contradictions of the world yet remain perfect. Taking refuge in that Birthless One, they became liberated into eternal bondage with Krishna.

Just because their poems were not mundane, we should not quickly jump to the conclusion that they are mystical.

Their songs are not unearthly, but rather earthly in its most divine sense. Their songs are about the plays of children, friends and lovers. Their poems are poetical expressions of that timeless lila and are inseparable from that reality. They did not realize this lila through any course of austerities or long periods of technical meditations, but because Shri Krishna wanted them to see. Generally Lord Krishna grants souls liberation, but the realization of 'lila' is not a common gift. Perhaps the reason for this is that He can only allow that connection to exist with souls that He can truly relate with. Other souls, either revolve in the world till the creation is reabsorbed, or He liberates them into Himself and in the process destroys all traces of personality. The Lord comes off his cloud for those souls who are blessed with the seed of the Devotion of Grace and enters into a mutual relationship with the soul that is freed from fear. The gap between the transcendental and the soul is filled with a mutual appreciation. The Ashta Chhap poets are the finest examples of this wonderful reunion. Instead of realizing the Lord as only residing within their hearts, they experience Him through all their senses and pervading the world they lived within.

They did not go out searching for Radha Krishna. They were found romping through every square, corner, road, village, forest and city within the land of Braja where Krishna was born and passed His early years. This experience of observing the Lord every where is called 'sarvatmabhava' or total love. It excels transcendentalism which rejects or tries to surpass this very God given existence in hopes of higher states. Nothing is wrong with the world, it is only a question of outlook. The birthright of every human being, the ups and downs of living are absorbed into lila where Shri Krishna is the star of every play, there, even separation is total joy.

While Shankaracharya and other absolutists tired of suffering sought to obliterate their personal identity, the supposed cause of that suffering, we see in the Ashta Chhap poets that they threw their individual identities into the fire of devotion. Although each of the poets had their own individual expression, their fuel for creative devotional expression was

found everywhere. The simplest actions of daily living, love, hate, jealousy, greed, lust and an array of other emotions all find their way into their poetry but they never caused any suffering because they were directed towards Shri Krishna. They enhanced the flavor of devotion. The Supreme became a child, a prankster, a lover, a king, a lad, and an infant without losing any of His Primal Greatness. Many can see the Great in the Supreme, but only those who actually come to know the depths of love and pass beyond the qualities of majesty, rest in the abode of love. They are able to behold the great in the small.

While great Yogis practising abstract meditation never catch a glimpse of Shri Krishna, He dances before the Gopis for a glass of buttermilk.

While the Vedas, unable to grasp the Lord proclaim, "Not that, not that", Mother Yashoda binds Shri Krishna with a string.

While hermits grow thin from their austerities, Shri Krishna takes lunch with His friends by the cool banks of the Yamuna river.

While the greatest of intellectuals try to confine Him within the narrow limits of their mind, the sweet note of Shri Krishna's flute steals away the minds of the Gopis making them forget everything except their beloved Lord.

While the religious monk renounces the world and goes into solitude, the Lord's devotees renounce the world and offer it to Him, and then live happily in it.

While others fear the Lord, Shri Krishna fears His angry mother.

While others believe the Lord to be the punisher of sinners, Shri Krishna is able to grant to the greatest sinners what accomplished yogis are unable to achieve after lifetimes of meditation.

While some believe the Lord to be perfect, Shri Krishna is the Butter Thief.

While some believe the Lord to be formless, Shri Krishna is every form.

While some believe the Lord to be great, Shri Krishna is the smallest child.

While others pray to the Lord for the redemption of their sins, Shri Krishna prays to His devotees for a morsel of food.

Within the Ashta Chhap poets we see a rare combination of artistic perfection, renunciation, and passionate devotion. Their lives and songs enhance even Krishna's flavour. Nandadas summarizes the attitude of the Ashta Chhap poets when he requests that his poetry be:

Filled with mood divine
gracious words,
soft speech unprecedented,
so sweet when spoken, heard and understood.

Not too revealing
nor too concealing . . .
The poet Nandadas further hopes
"My poetry should not be heard
by those devoid of appreciation."

These accounts have been told and retold in the homes of bhaktas all over India. Now they have found their way West.

THE LIFE AND SONGS OF SURADAS

SURADAS'S CHILDHOOD

Suradas was born in the year 1479 at Sihin, eight miles from Delhi. It was there that the son of King Parikshit (of Bhagavata fame) performed a snake sacrifice after his father was killed by a snake. Suradas was born of Sarasvata Brahman parents. From birth he had no eyes or eye sockets; only an eyebrow. His poor parents, who had three sons before Suradas's birth, were distressed at the sight of their blind son. His father said to himself: "The Lord has made me poor, and now He has given me a child like this. Who will look after him? who will lead him around with his stick?"¹

Suradas's father suffered greatly from his son's infirmity. No one in the family gave Suradas any love or affection or even talked to him. His parents wondered what to do with a son who had no eyes!

Life continued thus for Suradas until he was six. One day, a wealthy Kshatriya of the village gave Suradas's father

1. Many people argue that Suradas was not blind from birth. They cannot understand how a person who had never seen the material world would be able to compose such magnificent poetry, filled with visual images. However, Suradas has clearly stated in many of his poems that he was indeed blind from birth. His vision, turned inward, allowed him divine sight. Bhakta Nabhadra sings about Suradas:

From his birth without material eyes
Seeing with divine eyes
Sur is soaked in Bliss.

the gift of two gold coins. Taking the bounty home, he joyfully exclaimed: "The Lord has blessed me with two golden coins. Tomorrow I will buy supplies which will last us for the next two to four months."

Upon showing the coins to everyone, he wrapped them up in a cloth and put them inside a closet. That night, a mouse took the golden coins and put them in a hole in another corner of the house.

The following morning when Suradas's father discovered that the coins were missing, he and his wife wailed piteously. They passed the whole day full of anxiety and fasted. The little Suradas realized the futility of their grief, and said to his parents, "Why do you agonize over worldly problems? The only true wealth in this world is the Lord's worship. Only through Him can man achieve the highest good."

Hearing his unwelcome advice, his parents reacted sharply, "Ever since your birth, we have not known a single happy moment. We have not even had enough food to eat. Now the Lord gave us two gold coins and they too have disappeared."

Suradas was not much moved at the wailings of his parents, over the loss of the gold coins and repeated his advice. His aggrieved father took the advice as salt to his injuries and shouted: "If you are spiritually so advanced, why could you not find out the lost property to help a poor man like me? Is it not a duty of the holy people to come to the rescue of the distressed?"

Suradas replied calmly: "Yes. I can recover your gold coins, but that on one condition." His father did not take it seriously. He could not believe that his little blind son could really perform what he said. Yet, out of sheer curiosity, he accepted the challenge: "What is your condition? Tell me, I promise to go by the condition whatever it may be."

Suradas replied: "As you are so keen on getting your coins back, you will certainly do that. But, in lieu, you will lose me. If I can get you the coins back, I shall no longer live with you. Because I am blind and in no way capable of helping you in the household, you consider me a burden. I want to relieve you of the burden forthwith."

His father did not take the proposition seriously and did not believe that his blind son could really play a miracle. He agreed to the proposal.

Then Suradas led his father by the hand to a remote corner of the house and said: "Look. There is a small hole made by the rats. Is'nt it there?" His father started to be astonished and wondered how this blind boy who hardly moves from his place could notice the tiny hole in the corner of the house. He admitted, "Yes. It is there." Suradas said: "Dig the whole." His father obeyed the command and lo, to his great amazement found the two gold coins wrapped in a piece of cloth. His joy knew no bounds and he felt very sorry for the harsh words which he had uttered to his son. He then said in an apologetic voice: "My son. Do not mind my words which I have uttered out of despair and under great distress of poverty. It is not from my heart which is full of affection for you. Now I have got back the coins which will relieve me of penury for some time. I will treat you well. Do not leave us. Where will you go? You are blind. Who will help you?"

Suradas remained firm on his condition. He refused to stay along with the family, saying: "Father! I am no doubt blind physically, but my Lord has given me a supernatural insight so that I can see the past and foresee the future. I am confident that my Lord will help me whenever I need His help."

Thus Suradas left his home and proceeded out of the village. He walked some eight miles and stopped by the side of a large tank. He selected the spot as his future abode and started living there under the shade of a huge pipal tree. The villa-

gers heard about Suradas's miraculous power and started coming to him with questions about their problems.

The village belonged to a Brahmin Zamindar. After a few days, the Brahmin lost ten of his best cows. They were set free in the morning for grazing in the nearby fields but did not return till late in the evening. The Brahmin became very much worried over the loss and sent his men all around to search out the cows. They searched through all the neighbouring villages but drew a blank.

By this time, Suradas's fame reached the ears of the Brahmin. He wanted to have a chance with Suradas. He approached him and requested him to tell where his cows might have been. Suradas meditated for a moment and said : "All your cows are safe and well. They have gone a little distance and lost their way. Ask your men to walk some ten miles to the north-west direction upto the side of a lake. There they will find the cows. The Brahmin obeyed and in the evening of the second day, his servants brought him the good news that the cows had been found and led back home.

The Brahmin was very glad. He met Suradas again and as an expression of his sense of gratitude, said : "Suradas ! Henceforward, you need not worry for your food. My servant will bring food to you everyday."

The next morning the Brahmin asked one of his servants to carry some food to the blind boy living by the side of the tank. The servant misunderstood the command of his master as an act of charity to a blind beggar and hence offered a few stale breads and a little vegetable to Suradas. When this food was presented to him, Suradas's feelings were hurt. He retorted : "Send your master here. I will not accept the food till he comes and talks to me."

On receiving the message, the Brahmin rushed to the spot and enquired : "What is the matter, Suradas ? Why have you refused the food and keep on fasting ?"

Suradas replied, "I will not eat your stale breads."

The Brahmin then went home and brought some fresh fried breads and milk to Suradas. After giving Suradas some water he told him, "You don't worry about anything. As long as the Lord supplies me with something to eat, I will supply you. Wherever you want me to bring your food, in the town or by this lake, I will."

The next morning, when the Brahmin came, Suradas told him, "I wish to reside by this lake, under this fig tree for some more days."

The Brahmin then built a hut for him and had one of his servants wait upon him.

Later, that Brahmin told five or ten other people that Suradas was very wise. He explained, "He told me where my ten missing cows were. He can predict things correctly. I have made a hut for him under a fig tree by the edge of the lake and daily send him fried breads, curd and milk. I have given him one servant. If you want to know anything about the future, or anything else, go and ask him."

Hearing that, people of the town started coming to Suradas. Suradas answered their questions. Because he was able to prophesize, many people began to worship him. They brought him delicious food, built him a large house by the lake, and gave him cloths and many other things. Suradas (dasa means servant) became Sura Svami (Svami means master). He started taking on disciples by giving them the tulsi necklace. Suradas sang poems before his disciples expressing his pangs of separation from the Lord. Because of his proficiency in composing poetry and his extraordinary powers, his fame spread and his wealth increased.

Suradas lived for eighteen years by the edge of that lake. One night a sense of true renunciation surged in him and he pondered, "To meet the Lord I renounced my home, and here I have been caught in the spell of maya. I have only enhanced

my own glory while I should have spread the glories of the Lord. I have ruined myself. I shall leave this place in the morning."

The following morning, he sent one of his disciples to call his parents and gave them his house and everything else. Afterwards Suradas left, wearing one cloth and carrying a stick in his hand. Those disciples caught in the webs of 'maya' stayed there, while those freed from the mundane world accompanied their guru. While proceeding, Suradas thought, "Braja is the Lord's land. We should proceed there."

However, when he reached Vishanti Ghat at Mathura, Suradas again considered, "If I remain here, my fame will spread. This is Lord Krishna's city, and it is not proper to gather fame here. I will come in contact with so many worldly people, happy and sad. Also, if my fame increases here, the religious guides of the area, the Chaubes, will become unhappy. It is not proper to reside here." Pondering thus, Suradas headed twenty miles downstream from Mathura and settled at Go Ghat on the holy banks of the Yamuna. Because the young man had a melodious voice and could prophecize wisely, people congregated around him. Many became his disciples and Suradas became famous throughout the land.

SURADAS MEETS MAHAPRABHU

In 1511, Shri Mahaprabhu, who was on pilgrimage from Adel to Braja, happened to halt at Go Ghat where Suradas was residing. Shri Mahaprabhu took his bath, and after his prayers, started to prepare his meals. He was accompanied by many disciples who also started cooking their food and making worship.

Suradas's disciples reported that Mahaprabhu Shri Vallabhacharya, the one who had defeated Shri Shankaracharya and heads of other religious sects during a debate at Vijayanagar

and who had established the Path of Devotion, had arrived. Suradas told his disciples to inform him when Shri Mahaprabhu finished taking his meals and would receive people. One of Suradas's disciples then went out and sat a little away from the place where Shri Mahaprabhu was staying.¹

Shri Mahaprabhu prepared the food and offered it to his Lord. After taking the 'prasada', he sat outside, surrounded by his disciples. Suradas's disciples then reported that Shri Mahaprabhu had come outside to receive people. Suradas, accompanied by his disciples, went to the guru who welcomed Suradas and offered him a seat. Suradas bowed respectfully to Shri Mahaprabhu and accepted.

Shri Mahaprabhu asked him, "Sing something of the Lord's glories." This he would ask of one who had become separated from the Lord, in order to purify him.

-
1. Almost a thousand years after Lord Buddha, Shri Shankaracharya was born in India. At that time, India was predominantly under the Buddhist influence. Shankaracharya desired to take the people back to their Vedic Dharma, but, aware of the fact that they would not be able to understand and adapt to the Theistic Vedic approach, introduced a monistic doctrine in which he taught that the Supreme Brahman was without qualities and that this world had appeared out of illusion. He claimed his doctrine was purely Vedic but it actually ran parallel to the Buddhist teachings already prevalent in India. The people easily adopted these beliefs and within a few years his teachings swept the country.

Shankaracharya's tenets came under heavy attack a few hundred years later when Shri Ramanuja appeared and proved that Shri Shankaracharya's teachings were not purely Vedic. Shri Ramanuja was followed by Madhva, Nimbarka, and lastly by Vallabhacharya. These four teachers started the four great schools on Indian thought.

When Shri Mahaprabhu was eleven years old he went to Vidyanagar in the south of India, then a Hindu stronghold, and successfully debated against Shri Shankaracharya's school, proving that the real import of the scriptures was devotion to the Supreme Being and that the world was real and had appeared from Him. It was at that religious conference that the title of Acharya (Great religious teacher) was conferred upon Shri Mahaprabhu.

Suradas sang the following poem :

* * * * *

Krishna, I am the hero of all sinners.
Those who transgress as I have
deserve similar disrespect.

What you have done for Ajamila¹
I have found written on a piece of paper.

But my heart will only have good faith
when you call upon other sinners.

I have attracted followers from here and there
and gathered them in one place.

Now so many have joined
and then so many more.

My mind rejoices and celebrates
while I commit acts that just fill my stomach.

To be trampled by all
is the fate I'll meet.

-
1. Ajamila was a Brahmin who left his newly-wedded wife and started to live with a prostitute, making his living by killing and stealing. He had ten children by that prostitute, the youngest of whom was called Narayana, which is one of Lord Krishna's names. One day, the servants of redemption came to take Ajamila. Ajamila terrified, called out the name of his youngest son, Narayana, for help but the Immortal Lord hearing his own name sent some of his messengers to rescue Ajamila from his precarious situation. When the servants of the god of redemption asked the messengers of the Lord what pious deeds Ajamila had done in order to invoke their holy presence, they replied that he had said the Lord's name once. After this experience Ajamila gave up his sinful life, began worshipping the Immortal Lord, and eventually realized the Supreme. The Lord showered his grace upon Ajamila in order to spread the glories of the divine name.

Oh, Lord of life! In fabricating all this,
I have ceased to remember You,
Now it is your turn to liberate me, Lord,
Sur, the greatest of the sinners.¹

Then Suradas sang another poem :

* * * * *

Lord, I am the crown of the sinners.
Others err for a few days;
I've been a sinner from birth,
You've delivered Ajamila, murderers, whores,
even Putana²
deserting me, you have liberated others.

How will my pain be removed ?
No one has the capacity to purify as you do.

This I shall inscribe.

-
1. In the Sur Sagar, a collection of Sur's poetry, the following poem is found which differs slightly from the above given text. A few extra lines of the poem run as follows :

I've found so very much pleasure
in contemplating this sect of mine.
It will increase six fold,
become a complete business . . .
I have great faith in you
but I've committed such disturbing wrongs,
Take me quickly, liberate me at once,
sings Sur, the jewel of all sinners.

2. Putana was a demoness who tried to kill the infant Krishna by smearing poison on her breast before breast-feeding the divine child. Krishna, recognizing her intention, sucked away her life force, removed her ignorance, and granted her a liberation difficult for even yogis to achieve. This is the greatness of Lord Krishna's appearance. He liberates anyone who approaches him, whether they love him, hate him, or even try to kill him.

I'm dying of shame, a Sun¹ among sinners,
though everyone says,
"He's really pure."

* * * * *

Hearing Suradas's poem Shri Mahaprabhu remarked,
"Why does Suradas, the brave warrior, whimper like a feeble
man? Sing about the Lord's 'lilas'."

Suradas humbly admitted that he knew nothing of the
Lord's 'lilas' and, therefore, could not sing about them. Shri
Mahaprabhu then told him, "If you want to know about the
Lord's 'lilas', go and bathe in the Yamuna river, then I shall
show you."

When Suradas had taken his bath, Shri Mahaprabhu
gave Suradas 'ashtakshara mantra'² and then completed Sura-
das's dedication by initiating him with 'Brahma sambandha'.³

1. Sun is a translation of Sur.
2. 'Ashtakshara' is an eight syllable phrase which means "Shri Krishna is my refuge." This mantra is still passed on by the descendants of Shri Mahaprabhu by repeating the sacred formula three times into the ear of the disciple.
3. Shri Mahaprabhu received the 'Brahma sambandha mantra' directly from Lord Krishna at Gokul. One night, Shri Mahaprabhu was distressed, wondering how 'bhaktas' could experience their reunion with the Lord. At that moment Lord Krishna appeared and told Shri Mahaprabhu, "Those to whom you give 'Brahma sambandha', I will accept." The 'Brahma sambandha mantra' is still given to the followers of the Path of Grace by Shri Mahaprabhu's descendants and means marriage or joining with God.

Then Shri Mahaprabhu explained to him the tenth canto of the Bhagavata.¹

Through the 'ashtalshara mantra' all of his sins were wiped out and he received the seven devotional practices: to hear the Lord's praises, to chant them, to remember them, to wait upon Him, to offer worship and salutations to Him, and to dedicate his actions to Him. By giving Suradas 'Brahma sambandha', the last two states of the nine-fold devotional process were transferred: to be the Lord's friend and to be totally surrendered to the Lord. Suradas received the highest devotional love when Shri Mahaprabhu explained to him the contents of the tenth canto of the Bhagavata. By hearing that, Suradas had a complete grasp of Shri Mahaprabhu's entire Shri Subodhini. Shri Mahaprabhu has written in the introduction to his commentary on the Bhagavata, Shri Subodhini, "I bow to the Lord, the full moon, who resides on the Shesha² of my heart in the milk ocean of 'lila' and who is being served by Lakshmi and her thousands 'lilas'." After hearing that, Suradas began to sing:

* * * * *

Chakai bird,³
fly to the lake
of God's feet.
There, love is never lost.
Nor does the oblivion of night exist.
It's a reservoir of joyous union.

1. Mahaprabhu explained to Suradas the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam because in that chapter the pastimes of Krishna are depicted, and this divine subject was to be the topic of most of Suradas's poetry. That section is considered to be Krishna's heart. It was in the tenth canto that Shri Krishna granted the blessed devotees of Braja Supreme Joy. Hearing the tenth canto from his guru, Suradas realized Krishna's divine pastimes.
2. The divine serpent God.
3. The chakai is "the female of a ruddy goose, a female ostrich."

There, Sanaka¹ resides as a swan,
other sages have become the fish,
and Krishna's nail shines as the sun.

Winkless blooming lotuses
never fear the moon.²
Black bees hum the sweet Veda.

In that lake,
blessed pearl fruits
imbibe the pure glory.

Oh, silly bird,
why leave that lake ?
What to gain here ?
There, thousand of goddesses
sport splendidly.

Says Suradas, now I have no taste
for petty emotions.
My hopes are with that lake.

* * * * *

Through Shri Mahaprabhu's grace, Suradas began to experience all of Shri Krishna's 'lilas' while sitting on the banks of the Yamuna river. Pleased with Suradas, Shri Mahaprabhu asked him to sing about the festivities of Shri Krishna's appearance day. Suradas sang a long poem about the birth of Shri Krishna and the joy and excitement of the occasion :

"When the people of Gokul heard that Nanda was the father of a newborn son, Krishna, their joy was boundless. Throughout that blessed town festive columns were raised.

1. Sanaka and his three brothers are celibate sages who continually wander around for the benefit of humanity, always appearing five years old.
2. The lotus fears the moon because when the moon appears (i.e. the night) the lotus closes,

"After considering all the astrological factors of Krishna's birth, the position of the stars, the hours and minutes, the Vedas were sung. Upon hearing the news, the women of Braja dressed and adorned themselves in new clothes, and applied collyrium to their eyes and a vermillion dot on their foreheads. They put on exquisite necklaces, tied their corsets, wore golden bangles and carried golden trays filled with auspicious delicacies. They hurried out from their homes as if a flock of Lalumi birds escaped from their cages. They gathered in groups of five and ten and sang joyous songs appearing like lotuses in bloom upon seeing the sun.

"Those dairy maids did not notice that the stoles covering their breasts were being blown aside. They wore beautiful saris; their faces highlighted with red powder which also filled the parting in their hair. They adorned their ears with resplendent earrings, wore flower garlands in their hair which dropped to the ground like a showering cloud.

"Those joyous Gopis were the first to reach the house of Nanda, the abode of their beloved. Entering the premises, they bowed their heads at everyone's feet. One of the Gopis whose face was unveiled started to cry out at the top of her voice: 'Long live the son of Yashoda, the one who fulfils all wishes. Blessed is this day, blessed is this night, blessed is this hour, this moment. Blessed is the womb of Yashoda to have given birth to such a child, It is her good fortune. The all-blissful fruit has blossomed. She has continued her lineage and rid every heart of distress.'

"Then Gopis began to sing, calling for the child to be brought outside. They made Gunja bead necklaces and ground natural colors and made decoration in the square.

"Other Gopis who were on their way to Nanda's house, carried on their heads large pots of curd and butter. From their throats came new cheers accompanied by the beating of the cymbals and mridangam drum. They all arrived at his place which looked like the rainy season during the month of Bhadrapada (September), with a river full of yogurt and ghee. Wherever one looked was a spectacle.

"The cowlads were 'blissed out' beyond description. One of them ran to Nanda and repeatedly fell at his feet. A second laughed to himself while embracing everyone. A third took off his own jewels and gave them away with hesitation, while yet another poured curd and milk over everyone's head.

Nanda then bathed and, after scenting his hands, worshipped his deceased ancestors and cast off the sorrow that his family would not continue. He then sent for some fine sandal paste, applied 'tilaks' on all the Brahmins' foreheads, gave them clothes, and bowed down at their feet. Then Nanda called for numerous cows and strong calves grazing by the banks of the Yamuna river who were capable of yielding plentiful milk as he put copper on their hooves, silver on their backs, gold on their horns, and bestowed them upon the Brahmins who were grateful and showered their blessings.

"Nanda laughed with his friends, honored them with 'tilaks' made with a mixture of musk, sandal balm, and camphor, placed jewelled necklaces over their heads, and gave them fine garments.

"It was as if the rainy month of Ashada appeared with the peacocks and frogs calling when the singers, bards, and story tellers filled the square and called Nanda's name, 'Don't forget our interests.'

"Nanda fulfilled their desires by presenting them gifts, respect, and other offerings.

"Rohini then sent for musk and striped colored saris and gave them to the Braja women who joyfully streaked out of Nanda's house, showering blessings as they proceeded to their husbands' homes.

"Beating of the drums was heard from house to house. Streamers, flags, and golden pots were set by every home.

Since that day, the people of Braja have not left the wealth of Krishna's joy."¹

When Suradas was about to sing about the Gopis' love for Shri Krishna, Shri Mahaprabhu intervened, "O listen Suradas, everyone will have that destiny if they worship Lord Krishna's feet."

Shri Mahaprabhu stopped him from singing about the Gopis' love because it was not something to be revealed to everyone. Such devotional mood is only known to the pure devotee.

Upon hearing that, Suradas no longer had doubts concerning his devotees. He realized that all of his followers would also eventually attain the perfection of devotional ecstasy if they surrendered to Shri Mahaprabhu as he had done. Suradas then called upon his disciples to take the refuge of Shri Mahaprabhu, which they gladly did. From that day, Suradas was no longer known as 'svami' (master) but as a totally surrendered 'dasa' (servant) at the feet of Shri Mahaprabhu. Later, his guru commented gleefully, "Suradas as if he is standing just next to Nanda's house witnessing the Lord's divine 'lila'."

Later he explained to Suradas Shri Krishna's Thousand Names² whereby the 'lilas' depicted in the Bhagavata became

1. How befitting that Suradas first praised the festivities of Krishna's appearance, for, in fact, he was singing of the birth of Krishna within his heart, throughout his devotional world. The joy the people of Braja experienced was also his own. He was singing not only of Krishna's appearance, but also of the birth of a new awakened Suradas. This song is still recited each year throughout India immediately after Krishna's hour of birth.
2. Shri Mahaprabhu originally wrote Purushottama Sahasranama, the thousand names of Lord Krishna for his eldest son Gopinathji. Gopinathji used to recite the entire Bhagavata before he would take his meals. Shri Mahaprabhu then composed the thousand names of the Lord and handed it to his son explaining that its recitation was equal to reading all the twelve cantos of the Bhagavata.

firmly established in his heart. Suradas then began to sing of all the Lord's pastimes revealed in the Shrimad Bhagavata as well as a number of other 'lilas' such as 'mana-' and 'dana lila'.²

Shri Mahaprabhu stayed at Go Ghat for three days and then, accompanied by Suradas and other disciples, headed towards the sacred sands of Gokul, the site of Shri Krishna's childhood sports. On reaching Gokul, Suradas prostrated himself before that holy village and experienced Lord Krishna's 'lilas' as a child.

Because Shri Mahaprabhu had established in Suradas's heart all of Shri Krishna's 'lilas' revealed in the Bhagavata, the mere sight of Gokul filled him with visions of the Lord's infant plays. Suradas desired to sing the glories of Lord Krishna's childhood pastimes before Shri Mahaprabhu who was very attached to the child form of Lord Krishna Navanita Priyaji.³ He sang :

* * * * *

Krishna holds butter
in his lovely hand
as he crawls across the sands.
He has adorned his body
by spreading curds across his mouth.
Lovely cheeks,

2. 'Dana lila' is the celebrated pastime in which Lord Krishna stops the Gopis on their way to market to sell their dairy products and demands tax from them. Suradas has written many poems about this 'lila' and about 'mana lila', when Shri Radha experiences annoyance in love and refuses to meet her Lord, despite his many pleadings. These are just a few of the 'lilas' of which Suradas sang that were not depicted in the Bhagavatam.
3. The 'Svarupa' of Navanita Priyaji appeared in the Yamuna river to Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple, a Kshatriya lady. She presented the 'Svarupa' to Shri Mahaprabhu who performed His divine services at Gokul. Navanita Priyaji is currently worshipped at Nathdvara in Rajasthan.

anxious eyes,
his brow wears
a fine Gorochan tilak.
His curly locks look
like lines of intoxicated black bees.
His tiger pendant¹
appeases women's hearts.
Sings Sura, blessed is a moment of that bliss
useless are the ages
if that joy is missed.

* * * * *

Then Shri Mahaprabhu considered that he had already arranged for all of Shri Nathji's divine services but he had not chosen a singer for the Lord. He decided to give the honor to Suradas who would sing about Shri Krishna's daily, seasonal, and festive glories. Future Vaishnavas who would sing Suradas's poems would become devotionally accomplished.²

When Shri Mahaprabhu reached the Govardhana Hill he took his bath and entered Shri Nathji's temple and told Suradas to bathe as well and come up for the Lord's sight. When Suradas climbed the hill and entered the temple, Shri Mahaprabhu requested him to sing something for Shri Nathji. Suradas sang a poem of humble salutation before the Lord.

1. A tigernail pendant is worn to ward off evil spirits.
2. Suradas was the first singer in Shri Nathji's temple. For many years the services of Shri Nathji were carried out in a very simple style. When Shri Mahaprabhu's youngest son, Shri Vitthalnathji (Shri Guasainji) organized the divine services, the singing, ornamentation, food preparation and other aspects of the divine worship ('seva') were quite elaborately performed. By that time, Shri Nathji had eight temple singers, one for each 'darshan', the period of time that the temple was open to the public. These eight singers are traditionally called the Ashta Chhapa, the Lord's eight friends. Four of them were the disciples of Shri Mahaprabhu, Suradas, Paramanandadas, Krishnadas, and Kumbhandas; the other four were the disciples of Shri Vitthalnathji, Govindasvami, Chaturbhujadas, Chitasvami and Nandadas.

* * * * *

I've danced enough, Gopal !
 I've worn the robe of lust and fury.
 Worldliness around my neck was jewelry.
 Anklets made of infatuation
 resounded with sleep's sweet inebriation.
 Deception filled the drum of the mind
 in the gait of a swan its movement did align.
 Within the body, desire was the sound
 in which many a rhythm was to be found.
 Illusion's sash round the waist was worn
 and the 'tilak' of greed the forehead did adorn.
 Thousands of frauds as a loincloth were shown.
 Earth and seas were forgotten, time was not known.
 Says Suradas, this ignorance in all
 can be dispelled by Nanda Lal.

* * * * *

Shri Mahaprabhu then said to Suradas, "Now, there is no more ignorance in your heart, Shri Nathji has removed it all. Continue to sing about the Lord's 'lilas', expound upon the knowledge of His greatness and boundless love." Through the causeless grace of Shri Mahaprabhu, Suradas's divine vision fully opened to the Lord's 'lilas', and he never succumbed to any sort of egoism. He was always humble and considered himself a simple, poor soul. Suradas then sang a poem depicting the Lord's paradoxical forms of the supreme Lord and the child Krishna.

"Brahma,¹ Shiva², and the thousand-headed serpent god, Shesa, all wonder what meritorious acts the people of Braja performed, that, for their sake, the Lord appeared amidst them in human form.

-
1. The creator.
 2. The destroyer.

"The Lord's configuration is all brilliance; the entire creation rests in Him. He is the spiritual master of the entire world, its father, its Lord. He is difficult to be realized through the practice of Yoga, sacrifices, chanting, austerities, and fasts, yet that same Lord dwells in the house of the king of Gokul.

"In His belly rest the three worlds as well as all the creatures of land and sea, the five elements and the four directions. Yet, that very same Lord, the treasure of mother Yashoda's household, swings in a cradle at home. Out of His every pore emanates universal forms, infinite in bliss. Yet, that very Lord sits in the lap of His mother, Yashoda, who threatens Him with stick in hand. His eyes, like the brilliance of a million suns and moons, can dispel the three-fold miseries.¹ Yet, that very Lord has collyrium applied to His eyes by his mother to keep them healthy.

"With only three steps, the compassionate Lord measured the entire universe and sent Bali to the nether regions through his trickery.² Yet, that very same Lord cannot even cross the doorstep and has to play within Nanda's house. Every day the fifth kind of ambrosia³ flows from the celestial cow that fulfils all wishes. Yet, that very same Lord, leaving this, drinks his mother's own milk in order to give pleasure to his devotees.

"The Vedas, Upanisads, Vedanta, and the six scriptures are all offered to the Lord, but He does not even bother to enjoy them. Yet, that very Lord Hari laughs amidst His cow-herd friends and eats their leftovers.

-
1. The three kinds of misery are those caused by the body, by mind and by cosmic forces.
 2. Bali, the demon king, once occupied the throne of heaven. To restore it to the gods, the Lord incarnated in the form of a dwarf who begged the boon of three paces of land. On agreement, the Lord subsequently expanded to an enormous size whereby He was able to easily cover every region. Though He seized all Bali's possessions through this deception, the Lord bestowed His gracious blessing on Bali, being pleased with his total surrender.
 3. The other four nectars are the four Vedas.

"He is the Lord of Shri Lakshmi, the bestower of the eternal realm of Vaikuntha, and within His power lies the granting of all happiness and sorrow. Yet, that very Lord wanders barefoot through the forest with His cows, wearing a black blanket over His shoulder and carrying a staff in His hand.

"The whole world knows He is the Creator, the Destroyer, the Giver, Enjoyer and the Almighty. Yet, that very Lord is tied by His mother, Yashoda, when He is caught stealing butter.

"He gave final liberation to Putana, Bakasura, Sakata, Trinavarta, Aghasura, Kesi and Kamsa,¹ and kept them in the abode of His feet. The Lord is affectionate towards His devotees. He uplifts the fallen and always remains absolutely contented. Suradas, the king of the fallen has been stopped on the way by Krishna's door."²

Suradas composed all his poetry in accordance with the principles of Shri Mahaprabhu's Path of Grace, which can be briefly described as having full knowledge of the Lord's greatness accompanied by the highest and firmest divine love. Some might question why it is

1. Kamsa was the king of Mathura who sent the demoness, Putana, the demons Bakasura, Sakata, Trinavarta, Aghasura and Kesi to kill Krishna. The Divine Child made short work of all of them and awarded them liberation. This shows the greatness of Krishna's incarnation, that he granted His enemies spiritual rewards that Yogi have difficulty achieving.
2. In this poem Suradas has wonderfully described the seemingly contrary qualities of Krishna. On one hand, he is the all-magnificent God, but for the devotees of Braja, he is the son of Nanda, beloved of the Gopis, who dances for a glass of buttermilk. It is this Krishna who is endowed with all majestic qualities, yet childlike that Suradas adored.

While aspirants who follow the Path of scriptural law worship God endowed with majesty, Suradas and other blessed devotees worship Krishna, the beautiful young lad. To focus on God's Greatness, even be an obstacle for those steeped in the mood of divine love.

necessary to have knowledge of the greatness of the Lord. Why is it not enough to know Him as the Perfect Lover.

If we did not have knowledge of the Lord's greatness then we would have no fear of indulging in wrongful activities. When we are first beginning the devotional practice of trying to be the Lord's servant, knowledge of the Lord's greatness is absolutely essential.

The devotion which the people of Braja experienced was ultimate. Because their love was pure, knowledge of the Lord's greatness was not essential, like a penny to a millionaire. Krishna followed them wherever they wanted. Until we develop such perfected love, we should never forget the Lord's majesty. If we foolishly think that there is no need to know the Lord's all-powerful form, we will never come face to face with Shri Krishna. In the event of true transcendental love for Lord Krishna, the awesome omnipotent characteristics of the Lord naturally fade out. The Lord showed His greatness to the people of Braja again by destroying many demons and other evil forces, but the love those people cherished for Shri Krishna was so overpowering that they never viewed Him as being all powerful and majestic. They simply loved Him as mother Yashoda's little darling, protector of the cows and the prankster of Gokul.

If we forget about Krishna's divinity and indulge in our own welfare and happiness, we will be subject to impurity. For these reasons the knowledge of His divine quality acts as a restraining factor that regulates our lives within true spiritual order. Shri Mahaprabhu taught his devotees always to worship the Lord while observing all the prescribed rules and regulations of their social and religious order. By living within those limitations, the devotees could experience Krishna's boundless love, as did the people of Braja.

Shri Mahaprabhu then said to Suradas, "You have received the fruit of the Path of Grace. Now stay here on the Govardhana mountain and sing about the endless 'lilas' of Lord Krishna on all occasions." Suradas abided by Shri Mahaprabhu's instruction and sang about Shri Krishna's daily 'lilas'. His herding of the cows, His taking meals in the forest, His sports with the Gopis, and countless other childish pastimes, all of which Suradas actually witnessed with his divine eyes and sang them before Shri Nathji in the Raja Bihaga.

That evening he sang :

* * * * *

Why don't you speak, clever woman ?
Krishna, the lotus-eyed one,
tries exhaustively to meet you.

Since you have seen
that enticing Mohan
you have forgotten
the abundant pleasure of home.

Now Sur (Krishna) cries
'Radhe, Radhe',
his garland dropped here,
his shawl lost somewhere else.

* * * * *

With Radha on His chest
the Lord takes His rest.

With fresh flowers the new bed is filled;
the royal pair are brisk and skilled.

One lady attendant sings by the port
in melodies of a pleasant sort.

Says Sur, "She stays blissfully
holding Her Lord to Her breast."

Then Suradas sang :

* * * * *

In the blissful bed
the king of love
awakes the night
with his consort
drenched in the amorous mood.

Dishevelled clothes,
resplendent their jewelry and hair.

Face to face,
chest to breast,
tangled in embrace.

Tired, their sleepy eyes glitter,
half coherent talks
inflamed with love.

Says Suradas,
"Your ordinary glories
are known in Nanda's house
but your beloved is
filled with the nectar
of intimate pleasure."¹

* * * * *

-
1. This is the order which the poems are normally sung. First there is a poem which expresses Radha's annoyance in love towards Krishna, her pride leads her to refuse her to see her Lord. Then, after she is persuaded to join Krishna, comes the joyful union. These poems show that Suradas has realized that Lord Krishna craves for his consort and should be considered as milestones for the great blind poet. His realization of the divine aesthetic amorous mood has now fully blossomed.

CHOPADA (A BOARD GAME)

Once, while Suradas was walking with five other Vaishnavas he came across a group of ten men playing chopada, a type of board game. They were so absorbed in their game that they were oblivious to what happened around them and did not even notice the group passing by. Suradas, noticing their engrossment in their worldly play, enlightened his fellow Vaishnavas saying, "The Lord has given them human birth, which is especially intended to be wisely used in carrying out the Lord's worship, and these men have wasted their golden opportunity by living constantly in a dream world. There is no real fruit for that man who passes his time in such silly pursuits."

Suradas then sang the following poem :

* * * * *

Oh mind ! Consider, think and comprehend.

Without devotion the Lord's difficult to obtain,
so the Vedas loudly proclaim.

Throw the dice of good association,
while the tongues caught in the essence
of his glorification.

And when you make your score at last
to the other side you will have passed.

Leave the seventeen and hear the eighteenth.
Kill the five and leave afar the lowest three
and always think quick and cleverly.

The faults of lust, anger, pride and greed
to deceitful women and illusion lead.

Without the worship of Hari's feet
Says Suradas, "In frustration both the hands meet."

* * * * *

After Suradas had finished singing, all the Vaishnavas present asked him to explain the meaning of the poem. This is classified as one of Suradas's 'drista kuta' poems, for its actual import is not easily perceived.

Suradas then explained : "In 'chopada' three things are necessary : consideration, thought and comprehension. Similarly, these things are essential if one wants to worship the Lord. Just be acquainted with the rules of 'chopada', one must know about the Lord before he can worship Him. Just as one must think which scores are needed to win, after considering the nature of the all-destroying time one must know what kind of pursuit will help him to take refuge in the Lord. As the 'chopada' player must understand what moves are required to reach 'Home' and how not to be driven off the board, a true Vaishnava must always comprehend whether his actions are good or bad, and avoiding sinful activities, act in harmony with 'dharma'.

Just as in 'chopada', everyone exclaims upon the throw of the dice, similarly the Vedas loudly declare that the Lord is very difficult to be realized without resorting to devotional practices. As 'chopada' can only be played when two or more persons meet, spiritual nourishment comes through holy association when two or more accomplished devotees meet.

As the 'chopada' player is always conscious of his score and considers whether by a particular score he will win or not, a devotee, while remembering the Lord, recites with his tongue his untarnished glories, the refined spiritual essence.

As in the game of 'chopada', when all the moves have been fully scored, the pieces may reach 'Home' and the fear of being thrown out by the opponent's move no longer exists, to cross over this worldly existence one must possess the score of merit through which one can find the Lord's refuge. When I said one should leave

the seventeenth and listen to the eighteenth, I referred to the score of 18 which in 'chopada' is a higher score than 17. Similarly, of all the 'Puranas', leaving seventeen of them aside, listen to the eighteenth, namely the 'Bhagavata'.

Five signifies the five senses which are the five kinds of ignorance which should be dispelled. In the scriptures it is written: The moth is killed by its sense of sight which leads it into the flame. The elephant is killed through its sense of touch. The deer meets its death through its sense of hearing. The wasp is killed through its sense of smell, while the fish is killed through its sense of taste. Death comes through all the five senses and the man who is a slave to his senses is certainly devoured by time. In the same way, in 'chopada', the pieces are destroyed. The lowest score obtainable in the game is three, which no one likes to throw. Similarly, 'three' means the three material qualities, i.e. 'Sattva', 'rajas' and 'tamas'¹ which bind the soul. The world is like the board on which the game is played. One should throw the dice cleverly and after the toss he should not let his attention wander elsewhere.

Just as a 'chopada' player who has lost his attention is cheated, similarly, the whole world is entangled in the webs of lust, anger, etc. and swayed by the Lord's illusive power in the form of woman. A person who has been defeated in the game of 'chopada' arises with both palms joined, so one who has not been devoted to the Lord's lotus feet beats his hands together for wasting his life.

All the Vaishnavas present were very pleased to hear Suradas's detailed explanation of his own poem.

One day, Shri Mahaprabhu, upon reviewing Suradas's works, mentioned to him, "Oh Suradas, you are an ocean for as in that limitless body one can find everything in Suradas's

1. 'Sattva', 'rajas' and 'tamas' are the three modes of nature which can be briefly translated as purity, activity and inertia respectively.

writings: renunciation, devotion, Bhagavata, the Lord's 'lilas' as well as His different incarnations."¹

SURADAS MEETS THE EMPEROR

Suradas's fame as a poet-devotee spread all over northern India. Once it so happened that the Mughal Emperor, Akbar happened to hear one of Suradas's poems from his famous court singer, Tansena.²

Tansena sang:

* * * * *

Now hear of the devotee's qualities.

Some state his blame,
others his fame.

Some beat him
and take his wealth.

1. Suradas's ocean, unlike the salty waters covering the earth, is filled with ambrosia. Those who devoutly drink from the waters of Suradas's ocean become intoxicated with its divine nectar. The sublimity of Suradas's works lies in their ability to confer the actual experience of Shri Krishna. His poems are pregnant with realization and are capable of transcending themselves, from mere poetry into direct devotional awareness.
2. Akbar, the famous Mughal emperor, lived in Agra, and was very interested in Krishna worship. He met with Shri Gusainji and visited Vrindavan disguised as a Hindu monk in order to meet the saints. Tansena, his court singer, once sang before Shri Gusainji who gave him five hundred rupees and placed a shell on top of the money. When Tansena asked what was the meaning of the shell, Shri Gusainji revealed, "Because you are Akbar's singer, I have given you five hundred rupees, but when I compare you to the singing of Govinda Svami, it is worth one shell." Hearing Shri Gusainji's words, Tansena approached Govinda Svami and requested instruction. Govinda Svami would not teach him until he became Shri Gusainji's disciple which he later did and then studied with Govinda Svami.

Some smear him with sandal paste,
others smear him with mud.

Some say he is a fool
and most unrighteous.

Others say he has fine merits.

Good and bad never appear
in the minds of Krishna's servants,
nor will their loving devotion
to his feet waver for a moment.

Says Sur,
Those who are not affected
by pain and pleasure
meet the Lord
in a mere moment.

* * * * *

Akbar felt exhilarated when he heard Suradas's poem and decided to try and meet the great blind poet personally. Akbar sent one of his men to inquire of Suradas's whereabouts. When he heard that the bard was in Mathura, he set out for that town. Upon meeting Suradas, he honored him and requested him to sing something. Suradas then sang before Akbar his famous Sur Pacisi.

* * * * *

Oh mind, adore Madhava.
Lust, anger, greed and pride
all detract from your loving 'tide'.¹

1. When the mind makes lust, anger, pride, greed and illusion its lover, it must go through repeated births and deaths of suffering, Shri Krishna is the perfectlover for he is untouched by any material qualities and is perfect bliss in essence.

The black bee strolled in sylvan groves,
his thirst was not in the least consoled.

Each flower's juice sucked and stole away,
but when the lotus closed, inside you stayed.¹

Listen to love's extent,
The Cataka on water is bent.

For the cloud of hope he endures all pain,
but in other seasons he'll not taste rain.²

Look at the lotus's story,
To the sun she sings all glory.

Dry and withered, her life-force spent,
still to the sun her love is sent.³

1. The black bee is famous for his love of the lotus. He sucks other flowers of all their nectar and throws away their pulp, but when the black bee is enclosed inside the lotus, he will not cut through its tender petals even though he is capable of piercing wood. Once while a black bee was resting inside a lotus, the day ended and the lotus closed. Because of his great love for the lotus he decided rather than to cut through its soft petals, he would make his way out in the morning when the lotus bloomed. While engaged in such thoughts, elephant happened to come by and trampled over the lotus, killing the black bee. Like the black bee has natural love for the lotus, Suradas says we should have love for the lotus-like face of Shri Krishna.
2. The Cataka is a type of cuckoo bird known for his great love of October rains, so great that he will never drink any other water except the precipitation of that month (which is normally dry). As the Cataka has love for the October rains, so our love should be for Shri Krishna.
3. The lotus opens and blooms only at the appearance of the sun, and sings his glories until sunset. It is by the same sun that during the summer season the lotus, because of lack of water, withers and dies. The lotus' love for the sun is so great that even when it sucks up the flower's waters its love for the sun does not diminish. Similarly, our love for Shri Krishna should remain strong and constant and should know no obstructions of any kind.

The moth knows no pain
flying into the candle flame.
Though in flames your body burned
only love you there discerned.

The fish without water its life could not bear
though the water kept her without any care.
From her source, then, her body she did depart
yet love for the flood did not decrease in her heart.¹

The resolved dove had love,
and flew looking to the sky above.
He saw the stars he rose so high,
now dead upon the earth he lies.

Listen to love's strange way,
Hearing the enchanting melody play,
one foot back the deer can't retreat,
in her heart an arrow did meet.²

Look at the foolish widowed girl,
with her husband to death she'll hurl.
Funeral fire you fearlessly lit,
with your husband now you'll sit.³

1. The fish relied on water to maintain its life, So strong is its dependence that without water it is unable to live, though the water never paid any special attention to the fish. Even when the fish died due to lack of water, it still felt only love towards the water. Likewise, Suradas says, worship Krishna and suffer all physical, mental and spiritual pains even if the Lord seemingly ignores you.
2. The deer had love for the hunter's song and became so absorbed in it that she met her death by the hunter's arrow. Likewise we should become absorbed in the songs of Shri Krishna so that His arrow of love may pierce our hearts.
3. The girl whose worldly husband has expired, foolishly wishes to ascend to the after-world of her husband by entering into his funeral fire. We should not thoughtlessly waste this human body because it is useful in performing Shri Krishna's devotional services. We should only fearlessly light the fire of Shri Krishna's love.

The world and Vedas all forbid,
but the sad result from your eyes is hid.
Oh thief, to useless ways you tend.

You'll only come to a tragic end.
In worldly affairs your taste is found,
The world for you is a mere playground.

Your youth, body, mind and wealth all lost,
but still you play on at any cost.

Human body is the best of jewels,
but you know not its guiding rules.
Hear daily of the Lord's sweet glory
Yours is certainly a shameful story.

Vedas and the Puranas, too,
gods and saints their remembrance do.
You who are deluded in ignorance's way,
within their line why don't you stay ?

Take the bird, deer, fish and moth to mind,
as in my song their examples you find.
Within water, earth and every place,
to what extent can I state my case ?

Our sacred friend is the Lord,
in His hands our life-breath's cord.
Store of blessing, favor and grace,
within his hands all life is placed.

In mother's womb there was pain,
there you had no real fame.
Listen, ungrateful, the Lord of life

never left you in that time of strife.¹
 Day and night he fed you well
 like the one who betal leaves does sell.²
 All your pain he removed,
 and with milk, you he soothed.

You, insentient, He made aware,
 and elements He gave with care.
 Motion, hands and nails given,
 Eyes and nose and ears to listen.

Your family and all the rest,
 sons, wife and money chest,
 what a fool, you have slipped,
 your mind caught in a worldly trip.

In cities, food and drink consumed,
 now your youth is also doomed.
 Spend the night with a whore,
 and in the morning you fear the more.

As wealth and pleasure expand,
 in the body Cupid takes stand.
 In your eyes only smoke lies,
 and your close friend you don't realize ?

Of your increasing endless sins,
 Yama³ has heard from everywhere.

-
1. When the helpless undeveloped foetus was in the mother's womb, the Supreme Lord provided for its maintenance. Those who have forgotten the Primal Being are really ungrateful. When we become thankful to Him then we will worship Him and remain forgetful of everything else.
 2. Betal leaf sellers are known for the great care which they take to preserve their betal leaves, otherwise they would quickly wither.
 3. The god of retribution.

When Yama's servants came to strike,
 no one was there by your side.

How many times have we come and gone ?
 Pure vision has still not dawned.
 Love of Lord you have forgot,
 your is of the lowest lot.

Don't you feel a bit of shame ?
 A hundred times I've said the same.
 A single way, worship you never gave.
 Say Sur, "You're just a wretched knave."¹

* * * * *

Akbar, after hearing Suradas's poem, decided to test the bard's devotion and renunciation by offering him whatever he wanted if he would just sing something about his own glory as did the other court poets. Suradas then sang :

* * * * *

There's no vacant place in my mind !

How can another enter my heart
 in place of Nanda's son ?

Walking, looking, or waking by day,
 dreaming or sleeping by night,
 from my heart that enchanting beauty,
 Here and there, never takes flight.

-
1. Here the master poet Suradas rebukes Akbar by saying that not only has he never worshipped the Lord, but even after hearing this poem, he has no feeling of shame. What further advice can be given to such an insensitive person ?

Uddhava told endless holy stories¹
and the way to foster many glories.

What use for them, soul filled of love's potion
a jug just cannot hold the ocean.

His body dark and lovely face.
his gentle laugh and gait so light.

Oh how these thirsty eyes are dying,
Sur says, to see this very sight.

* * * * *

Akbar then asked, "How can a blind man have thirsty eyes?"

Suradas replied, "I'm thirsty for the Lord's sight, for every moment I enjoy the bliss of his presence."

Hearing that, Akbar thought, "He did not sing anything about my own glories. He desires nothing from me. He knows only the Lord and sings just his praises." Akbar then asked Suradas, "If you have no eyes, how are your eyes dying of thirst, and without seeing how are you able to create such visual images?"

Suradas replied, "Of these things, what can you know? Everyone has eyes, but only some rare people have eyes that are thirsty for the Lord's sight. Those souls live in the Lord's presence and drink continuously the nectar of his all blissful form, and are always thirsty for more."

Akbar then tried to give Suradas a few towns and a great deal of wealth but Suradas did not accept any of it. Akbar then urged him to ask for whatever he wanted. Suradas replied, "From today onwards, never call on me, and don't ever try to meet me," and walked away.

1. Uddhava came to Braja to teach the Gopis yoga but later realized the supremacy of their devotional love.

A FAKE SURADAS POEM

On his return to Agra, Akbar started looking for some more of Suradas's poems. He proclaimed a reward of gold and money for the person who would present him with one. A pundit, Kavishvara, in his greed for money, wrote some verse and handed it over to Akbar, but the king replied, "This is not one of Suradas's poems. Out of your desire for wealth you are faking poetry."

Kavishvara argued, "How do you know it is not Suradas's poem, it certainly is."

Akbar then took one of the great bard's original works and put it along with the poem Kavishvara had brought into the water and declared that the Lord would decide if the newly arrived verse was indeed by Suradas.

Kavishvara's poem became soaked with water and sank to the bottom while that of Suradas remained dry. Kavishvara returned home, hanging his head in shame.

Those who sing the songs composed by the great Vaishnavas who have realized Krishna can cross the ocean of 'sansara'. The fraudulent ones who sing mundane songs will sink in 'sansara'.

CRADLE SONGS

Following this encounter with Akbar, Suradas returned to Shri Nathji's temple and there sang poems before his beloved Lord. Sometimes when Kumbhandas or Paramanandadas happened to sing before Shri Nathji, Suradas would go to Gokul. There he sang many songs in praise of the child 'svarupa', Navanita Priyaji. Once, while Suradas was at Gokul having the sight of Shri Navanita Priyaji he sang about the Lord's childhood 'lilas'. Shri Gusainji was very pleased to hear Suradas's poems. Afterwards, Shri Gusainji composed one poem in Sanskrit which depicted the Lord swinging in his cradle, and taught it to Suradas. Suradas sang that poem to the Lord who was swinging in His cradle during the mid-morning services.

After singing Shri Gusainji's songs, Suradas composed a similar poem in Braja Bhasa.

* * * * *

The Gopis rock Love's cradle
abounding in bliss.

When Krishna smiles, his teeth shine
while his anklet bells jingle sweetly.

Upon his brow rests
a black dot and saffron 'tilak'.

His eyes, marked with collyrium
are like love arrows
and pierce the heart.

With his hands, he delightfully brushes aside
locks from his face
and removes the Gopis' annoyance in love.

Krishna grants those dairy maids oceans of delight.

Sur sees that beauty
and offers his mind and body to Krishna.¹

* * * * *

Suradas then sang another poem depicting the Lord's childhood 'lilas'.

1. In this poem it is interesting to note that the Lord who is pictured as an infant swinging in a cradle is also able to take away the 'mana' (annoyance in love) of women who are in their prime of youth. This poem clearly expresses how the Lord can support two seemingly contradictory moods at one and the same time: the 'dharma' of being a sleeping infant in a cradle, and the 'dharma' of a young lover who is able to break the 'mana' of his beloved. How beautifully he has described the Divine Child and Lover within the same form.

* * * * *

Look at the beauty that has arrived.

Above the ocean's son, a swan lies.

On it are seven colorful bugs.

The curd's son is being given to the ocean's son.

Nanda Baba seeing that beauty starts to laugh.

Says Suradas Shyam, what the lotus' son's carrier eats
is being tasted by a parrot.¹

* * * * *

SURADAS IS TESTED

Shri Gusainji then proceeded to Shri Nathji's temple, and Suradas decided to follow but Shri Girdharji and the other sons of Shri Gusainji approached Suradas and requested him to sing before Shri Navanita Priyaji for two more days.

1. At first reading this poem it seems to make no sense but upon closer reading, Suradas's poetical wisdom is revealed. The images in the poem have the following meanings:

1. The ocean's son is the moon, which refers to Krishna's moon like face.
2. The white swan with colored bugs on it, is Krishna's jewel studded cap.
3. The son of curd is butter which is given to the ocean's son, the moon, Krishna's face (mouth).
4. The lotus's son is Brahma, the creator, for he appeared on top of a lotus. His carrier is a swan which is known for eating pearls.
5. That pearl, or nose ring which Krishna wears is being tasted by a parrot, which symbolizes Krishna's nose.

The meaning of the poem goes something like this:

Look at Krishna's beauty, above His moon-like face is a jeweled cap. Butter is being given to Krishna's mouth. Nanda Baba, seeing that beauty, starts to laugh. Sur sings, a pearl hangs from the end of Krishna's nose.

Shri Girdharji, Govindarayaji and Shri Balakrishnaji considered, "Suradas always gives the correct description of Navanita Priyaji's ornaments and dresses. One day we should decorate the Lord in a special way without telling Suradas and see how he describes the Lord."

Shri Girdharji, the oldest of the brothers advised, "Suradas is a great devotee. He experiences the Lord's blissful form within his heart. Whichever way you decorate the Lord, Suradas will describe him in his songs. It is not proper to test a 'bhakta' like Suradas."

The other brothers replied, "There is nothing wrong in doing this."

Girdharji then agreed, "In the morning we will make some special decorations." The following morning, the three brothers entered the temple, bathed, and then awoke Lord Navanita Priyaji and offered him his breakfast. After bathing the Lord, they decided not to put any cloth on Navanita Priyaji because of the hot day. They adorned him with two pearl necklaces. Pearl armlets, a pearl belt and pearl anklets. At that moment Suradas realized that the Lord was adorned in an exceptional fashion. He thought, "I have never seen or even heard of this type of ornamentation. The Lord is wearing only pearls, and no clothes. Today I will sing a special song to match his unusual adornment."

When the temple opened to the public, Shri Girdharji called to Suradas, "See the Lord and sing his praises." Suradas then sang the following poem in the 'vilavala raga'.

* * * * *

Oh, see today the Lord is nude.

His naked body only pearls adorn,

Causing waves to rise from his beautiful form.

Seeing a million Cupids in every limb,

Their endless sweetness made Rati shy.

His face smeared with butter, He squeals with delight.
Sur with the Braja maidens laughs at the sight.¹

* * * * *

After hearing that poem all the brothers asked Suradas, "What have you just sung?"

Suradas replied, "I have sung about the Lord in the same amazing way as you have ornamented him." The brothers, hearing that, became very pleased with Suradas who was such a blessed devotee of Shri Mahaprabhu that the Lord revealed Himself to him everyday.

Afterwards, Shri Girdharji took Suradas to Shri Nathji's temple. Shri Girdharji relayed the entire event to his father, Shri Gusainji. The guru replied, "This is not surprising. Suradas is a vessel of the Path of Grace. He has the Lord's presence twenty-four hours a day. He has acquired Shri Mahaprabhu's total grace."

THIRSTY SURADAS

A Brajavasi boy named Gopal used to serve Suradas by performing his simple daily jobs. Once, when Suradas was about to take his meals, he asked Gopal to bring him some water. Gopal told him, "I will bring you your water when you sit to take your meals." Saying that, he went outside to fetch some cow-dung.

-
1. The Lord does not need any ornaments, for He is always completely adorned with His own self-contained beauty. The waves that arise from His beautiful form fill His devotees with the highest bliss. When the Lord remembers His beloved Gopis, emotional waves upsurge within His heart. His beauty, emanating like a thousand Cupids from every limb makes Rati, the wife of the god of love, shy. Until she saw Krishna, she had arrogantly thought that she was the fairest in all the worlds, but the transcendental splendor of the Lord removed all of her false ego. Only when His devotees' devotion becomes pure and soft as butter will the Lord laugh and delight in their company.

On his way, he met a few Vaishnavas and became so absorbed in talking with them that he completely forgot about Suradas's water. Meanwhile, when Suradas began eating, a piece of food got stuck in his throat causing him to choke. When he was unable to find his water, he began to panic. Shri Nathji, coming to know of Suradas's plight, left his temple and came to the 'bhakta' to give him water from his own golden pitcher. Meanwhile, Gopal, remembering that he had forgotten to bring water for Suradas, hurriedly rushed back to Suradas's room. There he saw that Suradas had finished his meals. Gopal asked, "You have taken your meals? Where did you get the water?"

Suradas replied, "Why do you call yourself Gopal? (Gopal means Krishna) Only Shri Nathji is the true Gopal. He protected me today: when a morsel of food got stuck in my throat I could not cry out and was in panic. At that moment I suddenly found a pitcher in my hand and drank its water. The real Gopal, Shri Nathji, must have brought me His water. See what the pitcher looks like."

When Gopal went to where Suradas had taken his meals, he saw the Lord's golden pitcher. Taking the pitcher he returned to Suradas and said, "This is the temple's pitcher."

Suradas reprimanded him, "You have done a terrible thing. you have caused the Lord great hardship. For my sake, Shri Nathji had to come with his pitcher of water. Now take good care of that pitcher and when Shri Gusainji arises, give it to him."

Gopal took the pitcher and went to Shri Gusainji, placed the pitcher in front of him and bowed respectfully.

Shri Gusainji questioned, "How did you get Shri Nathji's pitcher?"

Gopal confessed, "The fault is mine."

After he explained everything to Shri Gusainji, the latter took his bath, cleaned the pitcher, put a new cloth over it,

filled it with water, and presented it to Shri Nathji. Then, he asked the Lord, "Today you have come to Suradas's rescue. Who else but you will protect the Vaishnavas?"

Shri Nathji replied, "A piece of food was stuck in Suradas's throat and he started to panic. That worried Me, for devotees are my very self. So, I rushed to save Suradas with the water from my pitcher."

Later that afternoon when the temple opened, Suradas went to have the Lord's sight. After Shri Gusainji made the afternoon food offerings he mentioned to Suradas, "Today Shri Nathji has truly blessed you."

Suradas replied, "It all happened through your grace. Otherwise, how would the Lord have taken note of a fallen soul like myself? Because we have surrendered our lives to the Lord through the intercession of Shri Mahaprabhu, Lord Krishna accepts all our offerings."

Shri Gusainji praised Suradas, "Oh Suradas! You are really a great devotee. Only pure-hearted souls can possess such humility."

THE GROCER

One grocer lived below the temple of Shri Nathji at Satipura (Gopalpura). He was greedy, attached to his family and wealth, and had never taken initiation from Shri Gusainji.

Daily he would ask the first Vaishnava who came from the temple to his shop in the morning what Shri Krishna was wearing that day. Afterward, when any Vaishnava came there to purchase food, the sly grocer dressed like true Vaishnava would eloquently praise Shri Nathji's ornamentation and divine appearance.

In this sly manner, he would talk to everyone, but he never had a view of Shri Nathji. To impress the Vaishnavas,

he would put the Vaishnava's 'tilak' mark on his forehead and would wear the Vaishnava basil wood necklace. He would tell the Vaishnavas stories about the Lord's divine love and thus everyone thought him to be a real devotee and bought their goods from him. In this deceitful way, he fooled the Vaishnavas and acquired a great deal of wealth, though never spent any of it. Until he was sixty years old he continued living like that.

One day, that merchant said to Suradas, "Today the Lord was ornamented so beautifully." He continued, "You have never come to my shop to purchase goods. You are such a great Vaishnava. What sin have I committed that you do not buy from me? This shop is yours and I am the Vaishnavas' servant; so have pity on me."

Suradas thought, "This grocer talks so sweetly but he is really greedy and deceitful. Now I will free him of his slyness. He has never seen Shri Nathji. Now I will persuade him to go and see the Lord, then I will make him a Vaishnava."

Considering thus, Suradas told him, "I know that you have never seen Lord Krishna and are not a Vaishnava, that is why I have never stopped at your shop. Tell the truth, have you ever had the view of Shri Nathji?"

Hearing that, the grocer felt ashamed and said, "How can I leave my work to go to the temple? If some customer came to buy something while I was away, he would have to go to another shop. If I lose such business, where will I get the money to feed myself? Also, there is no one who will inform me when the temple opens."

Suradas replied, "If I come and tell you when the temple is open, will you go to see the Lord?"

The grocer agreed, "When you inform me, I will go. I am anxious to see Krishna."

Suradas said, "I will tell you when the temple will be open in the afternoon."

That afternoon, after the temple conch sounded, Suradas came to that grocer and said, "The conch has sounded, it is time to see the Lord."

The grocer explained, "This is time the local people come to buy goods. I will go for the late afternoon 'darshana' (sight of the Lord)."

Suradas then went up to the temple, sang before Shri Nathji, and then returned to that grocer just before the late afternoon 'darshana' was about to start and said, "The temple is about to open."

The grocer replied, "How can I go now? This is the time when all the cows return from the woods, and if no one is in the shop, they will eat all my grains. Call me for the evening worship, by then the cows will have returned home."

When Suradas came to him for the evening worship the grocer avoided Suradas saying, "You have troubled yourself greatly for me but this is the time of day to light the candles. If there are no lights in my shop, the goddess of wealth, Shri Lakshmi will not come here. Also, someone might steal some wheat if I go out now. I'll go in the morning before I open the shop. Inform me when the temple is about to open."

Suradas then went to the temple and sang all of the evening songs.

The next morning after Suradas bathed he came to the grocer and said, "The temple is about to open, come with me now." The grocer explained, "Suradas, this is the time I must sweep the shop. If anyone goes away at this time without buying anything, there will be no business for the whole day."

He then asked Suradas to come back and inform just before the temple would open. Later, when Suradas came back to inform him, the grocer replied, "I have not done well this morning and many cows are roaming about. I will certainly come for the mid-day 'Raja Bhoga darshana'. Because

you are a great devotee, for my sake you have walked so often from here to the temple."

Suradas then climbed the hill, had the sight of Shri Nathji, and sang before his beloved Lord. When the 'Raja Bhoga darshana' was about to start, Suradas came to that grocer and said, "Will you go now?"

The grocer made the excuse, "Now is the time all the Vaishnavas come down from the temple and buy goods from me. I, being old, cannot quickly run up to the temple for the Lord's sight. This is also the time to sell things and make my profit. I will go for the afternoon worship."

For three days that grocer went on making up excuses and, because of his greediness, never went up to see Shri Nathji. On the morning of the fourth day, after Suradas bathed, while going to the temple, he thought, "For the past three days this grocer has not gone to see the Lord. Now I shall have to do something more effective." Suradas then approached the grocer and said, "Now come for the morning 'darshana'."

The grocer again replied, "I will come for the later worship after I have done some business for the day."

Suradas then exclaimed, "Now I will tell all the Vaishnavas, 'This grocer is a fraud and has never gone to see the Lord, he is not a Vaishnava.' I will tell them all about your cunning ways."

Suradas then sang a poem in the 'Bhairava Raga':

* * * * *

Today work, tomorrow work,
and the day after, work to do.

Yesterday, with your face turned
you loitered with much work too.

In your waking, work, and sleeping, work,
and after that, you'll die.

Oh, leave your work, remember Shyam (Krishna)
Says Sur, for there does your refuge lie.

* * * * *

Hearing Suradas's stern words the grocer grew afraid and fell at Suradas's feet pleading, "I will go with you now to see Shri Nathji, but please don't tell anyone about my deceiving ways and dealings."

Suradas then took the grocer up to Shri Nathji's temple for the morning worship. When the temple doors opened, Suradas said to Shri Nathji, "One of Your divine souls has arrived. Charm his mind, uplift him, he lives under Your flag."

The Lord replied, "Although he lives near Me, he does not know Me. It is only through the grace of great devotees that I can be found."

In the waters of the sacred Yamuna and Ganga rivers live many creatures, but they are not all liberated through their contact with the holy waters. Only through the association of devotees can one become spiritually accomplished, and find the Lord. Through the association of devotees, one achieves the sentiment of being the Lord's servant. Then, one becomes open to Krishna's grace.

Shri Nathji then revealed Himself to that grocer and charmed his mind. After the morning worship concluded, the grocer clutched Suradas's feet and said, "My entire life has been wasted in piling up wealth. Now tell me where I can spend my wealth. Make me a disciple of Shri Gusainji."

Suradas replied, "Bathe and return here."

When the grocer returned, Shri Gusainji had finished ornamenting Shri Nathji. At that time Suradas requested Shri Gusainji, "Accept this grocer as your disciple."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Suradas, you have enlightened a sixty year old misguided man. Without you, this grocer would have wasted his entire life."

Later, Shri Gusainji called the grocer, made him sit close to Shri Nathji and gave him initiation. After repeating the sacred mantra, the grocer's mind became pure. From that day he went to the temple daily and made generous offerings to Shri Gusainji. He also gave clothes, foodstuffs and ornaments for Shri Nathji.

One day that grocer requested of Suradas, "Through your grace I have had the sight of Shri Nathji and have become a Vaishnava. Now shower that grace over me which will make the Lord accept me in this life and free me from the worldly bonds of happiness and pain."

Suradas then sang to him the following poem :

* * * * *

Remember Krishna, it purifies the body
for as long as you live in the dream of this world.

Breaths are numbered, their conclusion drawing near,
Whoever does not consider the nature of illusion
will not be freed from re-birth.

Plant the seed of wisdom then
never rest again in the fire of another womb.

Repeatedly, I explain
that the second gone will never come again.

Deceitful women allures the senses
while the seconds tick the hours away.

When the end draws near
and the treasure lost, you're alien.

Why feel despair :
The tree won't bear fallen leaves,

The wind blows them away, never to return
and God makes another grow.

To find human birth,
the soul, as well as the bird, animal, and insect
kingdoms wanders the world in the sky.

But the body and mind lost
in worldly love and money.

Forget the wishing stone
and grab a piece of glass instead.

The good Lord never praised,
the mind just wanders in ten directions.

Distorted perception enters the heart:
He thinks he is a hero and desires everything.

In the heavens, nether worlds, and kingdoms of earth
the prideful man is not satisfied.

He reaches his limit without knowledge, empty.

Sometimes he meets and celebrates with a friend:
other times, with shy lovely girls.

Sometimes he sits in a chariot
with elephants and horses:
other times, in a happy flower bed.

Sometimes royal umbrellas and horsetail wisks
are raised over his head,
other times, he hunts and kills animals.

Sometimes festoons and canopies are arrayed;
other times, intoxicated elephants battle.

Drummer by the door,
his messengers all stand at attention
while desires increase one hundred fold;

Fine clothes, fragrant with flower oil,
young women affording numberless pleasures.

A thousand doors lead to his place
and brave guard stay awake everywhere.

In his dalliance, the night passes unknown.
Drinking maya, he is intoxicated with pride.

Concerned only with his sons, money, and wife
he awakes only when death comes.

Now, there are no more partners in his false play
no more drummer by the door,
nor horses or elephants.

In a moment, the king is made a beggar.
Why can't his heart withstand the pain of his faults ?

A loner without a Lord,
the warrior's arrows are aimed at him.

For the crooked deeds of his life
punishment is death.

For the sake of the body, other life has been killed
so the tongue can taste different flavors.

Yet, the body is lost in a moment
and becomes a ghost.

Then everyone cries,
"Ghost, Ghost, cast it from the city."

To murder for the nourishment of a body
that ultimately becomes ashes or feces.

Twenty four hours a day
fostering sense enjoyment with deadly poison
while turned away from God's feet.

Awake, Awake, where are you ?
You call this dream 'all mine'.

Without Krishna, who can liberate ?
He is compassionate and called you in your old age.

Don't take the support of other deities.

They talk of fine food, but never serve.

Life has past in desires
that, like a mirage, cannot satisfy.

What gods can afford bliss ?
Without Krishna, who can liberate ?

The god of redemption says,
"Listen to your deeds.

Have you forgotten your lust ?

In the womb God protected.

He removed our doubts and made us fearless.

He gave hands, feet, nose, mouth, blood,
and every pleasure.

Still you don't see that enjoyment as a dream
and avoid the Lord of Life.

How many arrows can one stand ?
Sinner, not one Vedic rule learned.

Countless times human life attained
yet God's path forsaken
as you run down the wrong way.

When time has expired
the end is distressing.
Human birth will not now be found.

To the Master, the back is turned
and selfish ends pursued.

A touch stone found and thrown in the ocean.

Learning what it was,
one beats his head in frustration.

The wishing stone left for a shell,
Listen to the extent of his kindness.

God gave a wishing tree
and he cut its roots.

Now, how will he find the tree ?
The Lord gave a plate full of sweet food
and he left it to taste poison.

Foregoing the Birthless, he abandoned
the wishing cow.

Leave the elephant's strength
and seek God's
Without Krishna this body is lost,
tormented like a chained monkey.

Why not do deeds like the sages
Suka, Sanka and Sananda.

Gods, men, sages and demons
have all worshipped Hari's feet and were bhaktas.

But even though the heart is burning
the head is not offered to his feet.
From his worship comes great pleasure.

Fool, have you forgotten ?
Countless sinners His name has uplifted,
and removed all life's karma and affliction.

They became fearless
and found the treasure of devotion.

The snake of time never devours them.

All of life is in Krishna's name.

He gives the supreme liberation
from the disturbance of the diseased world.

Sur, the beggar, sings by Hari's door.

The Shrimad Bhagavata is the supreme benefactor.

Krishna takes in surrender the most sinful
the dust of His feet bestows fearlessness.¹

Suradas sang these sixty couplets, and instilled seeds of renunciation, knowledge and devotion into that misled grocer's heart, making him a true devotee of the Lord and worthy of the highest respect.

BHAKTA'S REUNION

Once the poet Paramanandadas accompanied by some ten Vaishnavas travelled from Gokul to Gopalpura in order to have the view of Shri Nathji. There, they met Suradas in the temple who, at that time during the evening worship sang :

1. This poem that Suradas sang before the grocer is called Suradas's sixty lines of renunciation. Three poems make up this collection of poems on detachment. Suradas's twenty five lines of renunciation were sung earlier before Akbar. The third poem in this series, Suradas's one hundred lines of renunciation, is not in this text but can be found in collections of Suradas's poetry. Suradas strongly felt that without detachment from the mundane love for Krishna could not arise. This corresponds with Shri Mahaprabhu's teachings, "For the growth of the seed of 'bhakti', renunciation, listening and singing are necessary." In the line, "Sur, the beggar, sings by Hari's door," the poet refers to Krishna as 'Hari' to emphasize that the Lord takes away all affliction which confronts the 'bhakta'.

* * * * *

A moment with Krishna's bhaktas passed
cannot in any way be surpassed :
not by pleasures of heavens in millions,
nor by the joy of redemptions in billions.
Whose luck abounds and has merit amassed.

Upon such a one, Krishna's grace is fast.
Hymns to the greatness of those devotees' feet
Says Sur, Shri Bhagavata is replete.

* * * * *

Then Suradas sang :

* * * * *

When Krishna's 'bhaktas' are pleased with you
one is freed from all blemish
and beholds the Vaishnavas.

Filled with Hari's 'lila',
all other desires are rid from the heart.

Sur has definitely decided that
that's when Krishna becomes known.

Hari's 'bhaktas' are really great.
Emperors, the highest sages,
gods, and holy men
are put to shame when they see them.

Those 'bhaktas' make a throne for their
Lord with faith.

Pure praises of Krishna are His royal umbrella
which arches over Him in unprecedented glory.

Belief is their kingdom
which greatly inspires the people.
Lust, anger, pride, infatuation, and greed
are all the thieves.

'Bhaktas' imbibe the nectar love
of Krishna's lotus feet.¹
They are impassioned,
their priests are knowledge
who don't find time to speak of doubts.

Worldly wealth and lust, both stay afar
and bow their heads to liberation and 'dharma'.
Humility and wisdom are the amazing door guards
that are never on leave.

The eight supernatural powers stand
by the gate with folded hands.
They cherish 'bhaktas' to their hearts.

Those that understand the ways of Krishna's love
'maya' and time can't touch.

Says Suradas, "To be born human
should be known as the guru's grace."

* * * * *

-
1. A reoccurring reference to Krishna's feet is found in Suradas's poems. It is customary in India to touch the feet of one's elders and gurus. To take the surrender of Krishna's feet, or to imbibe the nectar of His feet is an indication of humility. Through worshipping the Lord's feet, one achieves qualification and the means to please Krishna. All the different limbs of Krishna are considered sacred, but Krishna's face and feet are mostly commonly referred to by Suradas and the other great poets. Worshipping Krishna's feet often indicated the devotional sentiment of accepting God as one's master. Mahaprabhu says, "Through the grace of Krishna's feet, the lowest being, a snake, is made into the highest being, a 'bhakta' the touch of His feet is rare."

And then Suradas sang :

* * * * *

The day saints come invited
the fruit of a billion baths at sacred shrines
is achieved by their very sight.

The face then shines every day,
the mind meditated upon the Lord's feet.
Mind, speech and action
know nothing but God.

They remember Krishna
and He remembers them.

Freed from falsehood and desire for reward,
they sing the Lord's pure glories.

Says Suradas, make association with those
who make you remember Krishna.

* * * * *

Suradas sang a number of poems with a similar theme. Suradas then asked for the grace and advice of the Vaishnavas present there. The Vaishnavas requested Suradas, "Please tell us about knowledge, Yoga, the supreme essence and what it is like to love the Lord."

Suradas then sang :

* * * * *

None have come across the Lord
through the path of Yoga.

Brahma, acting on His command,
took a very austere stand.

But was he ever once enhanced
by the flavor of the 'rasa' dance.

Shiva used Yoga as his design
to meditate on the essence divine.
But did Krishna His arm on his neck ever place
or serenade him sweetly in intimate embrace ?

* * * * *

Suradas then ended his poem saying :

* * * * *

Oh listen, Uddhava,¹
what to do with Yoga.

For, says Sur, "Both mind and heart
of dark-hued Shyam are now a part."

* * * * *

125,000 POEMS

After Suradas performed the Lord's services for many days, he realized the Lord wished him to return to His eternal realm of Vaitkuntha.

Suradas then thought, "I have sworn to compose 125,000 poems before leaving this world. Until now, I have composed 100,000. If it is the Lord's wish, I will compose twenty five thousand more poems, then I will cast off this physical body."

While Suradas was considering thus, Shri Krishna appeared and said, "Suradas, you have the wish to compose 25,000 more poems. Look in your poem book."

Suradas then asked one Vaishnava to look through his poetry book. That Vaishnava later noticed 25,000 new poems in the book bearing Sura Shyama as the signature name.

1. Uddhava was a yogi friend of Shri Krishna who tried to teach the Gopis Yoga. When he saw their abounding love for the Lord, he realized their true greatness and started to worship them.

He then mentioned to Suradas, "Yesterday there were no poems signed by Sura Shyama. Today there are twenty five thousand additional poems bearing that name."

Suradas then bowed to Shri Nathji and said, "Through Your grace my desires have been fulfilled. Now, I will follow Your commands."

The Lord replied, "Now return to My 'lila' : experience that love," and suddenly disappeared.

Suradas then bowed to Shri Krishna and experienced great bliss. Two Vaishnavas sitting next to Suradas did not know that the Lord had appeared to Suradas, for they were ordinary Vaishnavas and only accomplished devotees can experience the Lord's presence.

SURADAS'S PASSING

When Suradas realized it was the Lord's wish that he should return to His eternal abode, he went to Parasoli.

At Parasoli the Lord's 'rasa' dance is eternally played, during which the divine moon as well as the moon-lake (Chandrasarovara) appear. These 'lilas' have all been depicted in the Bhagavata. The eight famous poets or the "Ashta Chhap" have eight doors they pass through to merge into the Lord's 'lila'.

Suradas's door is at Parasoli, Chitasvami's door is at Apsara lake. At Surabhi lake, Paramanandadas is in charge of the door. At Kadambakandh, Govinda Svami presides at the entrance.

Beside the Rudra lake is Chatrabhujadas's door. On the road which leads to the 'rasa lila' is Bilacha lake over which Krishnadas presides. At the Mansi Ganga lake is Nandadas's portal and in front of Anyora is the Yamunavati town, where Kumbhandas has his door. The Lord's eternal bower 'lila' continues beyond those eight doors.

Arriving at Parasoli, Suradas bowed down to the flag on top of Shri Nathji's temple and lay down to sleep, thinking that through the grace of Shri Gusainji and Shri Mahaprabhu, he was able to have the sight of the 'lilas' of the Lord.

Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji, while ornamenting Shri Nathji, thought to himself, "I have not seen Suradas this morning, I wonder what has happened to him?"

He asked a Vaishnava if he had seen Suradas, the poet. The Vaishnava replied that Suradas had come in the morning, but, not feeling well, had returned to Candrasarovar. Shri Gusainji then knew that it was the Lord's wish that Suradas should return to His 'lila', and told all the Vaishnavas present there, "The vessel of Pusti Marga is about to depart. If you wish to take anything from it, now is your last chance."

Meanwhile, Suradas became unconscious, absorbed in the meditation of Shri Gusainji and Shri Krishna. When Shri Gusainji accompanied by a few Vaishnavas reached Parasoli, Suradas immediately regained his senses and, after bowing down to his guru, said, "I have been waiting for you. You have blessed me by your auspicious presence," and Suradas sang the following poem in the Raga Saranga:

* * * * *

Behold Krishna's disposition.
He is extremely profound
an ocean of benevolence.

For a sesame seed's worth of his devotees' worship,
He gives rewards as grand as golden mount Meru.
Shameful sins that would fill an ocean
He doesn't count as even a drop.

When facing His lotus feet,
see His joyous face.

When seen again, even after turning away,
through the grace of His face,
He looks the same.

When 'bhaktas' suffer separation
the merciful Lord chases after them.

Says Suradas, "Whoever turns their back on a Lord
like that is without fortune."

* * * * *

After hearing that poem Shri Gusainji said, "One should
know the Lord has fully graced one who has the humility of
Suradas."

At that time, Chaturabhujadas said, "Suradas is a great
devotee, and has composed over 100,000 poems, but he has
never sung the glories of Shri Mahaprabhu."

Hearing that, Suradas replied, "I have only sung of Shri
Mahaprabhu's glories. If I saw any differences between Shri
Mahaprabhu and Lord Krishna I would have praised them
separately. Because you have questioned like that, I will now
sing a song which reveals the mood of all my poems."

* * * * *

In His sacred feet,
have your faith's firm seat.

Moonbeams shine from
the nails of Vallabh's feet.

Without their light,
the worlds in blindness stray.

Impossible in Kali's day
to find the final way.

In two ways blind,
a wageless servant Sur does say.

* * * * *

In that poem, Suradas revealed his heart. He explains that devotees should have their firm faith in Shri Mahaprabhu's feet. Without the brilliance which shines from his toenails, the entire world remains engulfed in darkness. The only way to overcome the Kali age of struggle is to take refuge in Shri Mahaprabhu.

As those who see differences between Shri Krishna and His consort, Shri Svamini, are spiritually blind, so are those who see a difference between Shri Mahaprabhu and Lord Krishna.

Suradas is a wageless servant because he relies only on the priceless sentiment of Krishna's love. The servant who wants something from Krishna does not understand the highest form of devotion. Only a selfless servant desires nothing from God and is guided by His love. The Lord remains in debt to such generous devotees as He did to the Gopis in the Bhagavata.

Shri Gusainji then remarked, "Suradas's heart is filled with divine love for Lord Krishna. That is why Shri Mahaprabhu called Suradas an ocean."

Chatubhujadas then questioned, "Suradas, without you, who will reveal to us the divine love? Now teach us about the real form of Shri Mahaprabhu's Way of Grace and how we can experience its love."

Suradas then sang :

* * * * *

By worshipping in the Gopis' way,
Krishna's love with you will stay.

Not through means of any other kind,
His worship's not along such lines.
Taking a very peculiar stand,
Rama's Risis once did demand,

"Oh, change us all to female form
even though its backwards norm."
Clothes and jewels worn upside down,
but their mood in union found.

Like type all in reverse set,
but on the paper in order met.
Here the Vedas do not command,
for love's the one and only stand.

That alluring, eminent, clever Sur,¹
the Gopis through their love did lure."

* * * * *

One should worship Lord Krishna with the sentiments of the Gopis. Only the Gopis have the right to make Shri Krishna's services in the 'lila' bower. This type of devotion is not acquired by practice of any kind. For example, when the sixteen thousand Risis (sages) were enraptured with delight on beholding the beautiful form of Lord Rama in the Dandakaranya forest, they begged Lord Rama to give them the same pleasure that his wife Sita enjoyed. Lord Rama told them that their wishes would not be fulfilled at that time, but when He would appear as Lord Krishna, all of them would appear as Gopis and at that time would experience Shri Sita's divine bliss. When Shri Krishna appeared those Risis were born as Gopis and received Shri Krishna's highest love.

1. One of Krishna's names,

Women are not allowed to perform Vedic rites alone, but in the 'lila' they are the ones primarily responsible for Shri Krishna's divine services. For this reason, Suradas says that the Path of Grace is backwards, because there, the Gopis are the gurus.

When the Gopis went to join Shri Krishna in 'rasa' dance, they rushed out of their houses with all their garments and jewelry in disarray, so eager were they to unite with their Lord. Similarly, letters on a printing press are reverse but after printing appear straight on the paper.

The people called the Gopis crazy, but actually they had risen above everything mundane to the consciousness of Krishna's love. That divine mood which the Gopis experienced is beyond the Vedas. Those who experience that devotional love have the Lord under their control, yet He is never defeated, a warrior most clever, and bewilders everyone.

After the Vaishnavas heard that, they all praised Suradas, "The Lord has showered His grace on you."

Shri Gusainji then questioned Suradas, "Where is your mind now?"

Suradas then sang the following poem :

* * * * *

Over you, maiden Radha, I celebrate
for you have chosen to love
Nanda's son, Krishna.

He is eminently ingenious
and you are the crown of cleverness.

How can you love him and remain apart?
He robes Himself in golden garments
and controls your every moment.

Radha, possessed by Krishna's natural charm,
reaches out to grab the sky,
imagining she takes Him to her breast.

She sees His beautiful form,
her hair stands on end.
Sur sings, the good lady is bemused.

In the illumination of love,
she has become comical.

Lastly, Suradas sand :

* * * * *

Nectar-maddened Khanjan eyes.
With such quickness they dart in a wonderful way,
for, engaged in an eyewink, they will not stay.

Time and again they fly out to each ear
to return from the noose-like earrings so near.
Held by the kohl there they stay.
If not, says Sur, they would fly away.¹

* * * * *

1. Look at Suradas's mental condition before he was going to leave his body. Unaware of anything material, his mind and heart were transfixed on the luscious form of Shri Svamini and Lord Krishna, intoxicated with the nectar of each other's love. Seeing their drunken maddened eyes, Suradas compares them to the 'Khanjana' (wagtail) bird which is also known for its beautiful flirting eyes. In the madness of love, their eyes dart about looking for an exit, but not even the eyelids can contain them for they are so entranced in the passion of love. Suradas's poems can always be read at several levels. Here is another meaning to this verse : Suradas, whose material body is like a bird, can no longer be captured in the cage of worldly existence. The kohl line can be compared to his very life breath which holds him down to his body. Otherwise, he would just fly off to merge in the Lord's 'lila'.

After Suradas sang that poem, he fixed his mind on Shri Krishna and Shri Svamini, cast away his worldly body, and merged with the Lord's 'lila.'

Shri Gusainji then returned to Gopalpura, while the Vaishnavas performed the last rites for cremating Suradas.

Suradas had four names. Shri Mahaprabhu called him Sura, which means warrior, for Sura faced everyone boldly and his devotion daily rose to greater and greater heights.

Shri Gusainji called him Suradas because Suradas's mood of surrender never decreased. As he experienced the Lord's 'lila' more and more, his humility also increased. Suradas never became proud.

Suradas's third name is Surajdas. Shri Svamini gave Suradas this name because just as a 'suraj', the sun lights the world, he illuminated their divine form. Suradas composed seven thousand poems depicting Shri Svamini and signed all of them Surajdas.

The twenty five thousand poems which Shri Nathji composed were all signed with Sur Shyama. Thus, any one of these four different names appears at the end of Suradas's poems.

Shri Mahaprabhu did not give Suradas a 'svarupa' of Shri Krishna to serve because he was always mentally absorbed in the Lord's 'lilas'. He experienced the fruit of the Lord's divine worship and constantly was possessed by the 'lila's' divine aesthetic mood.

The highest principle revealed in Suradas's life story is that nothing is equal to humility and service to others. For the grocer's welfare, Suradas went through much trouble, had him initiated, and ultimately liberated. Shri Mahaprabhu, Shri Gusainji, Vaishnavas and everyone else were pleased with Suradas. If anyone came to

Suradas with a question, he would lovingly explain to him the principle of the Path and would divert their thoughts to the Lord.

Out of a billion devotees, it is difficult to find one equal to Suradas. Suradas had received Shri Mahaprabhu's total grace. His 'varta' is fathomless, the story of his life is boundless, and we can go on praising him to no end.

PARAMANANDADAS

In Krishna's 'lila', Paramanandadas's form as the Lord's friend, is Tosh, and as a gopi he is Chandrabhaga.

Paramanandadas was born in Kanoja into a Brahmin family. On the day of his birth a rich man gave his father a large sum of money. At that time his father happily considered, "The Lord has blessed me with a son as well as with wealth. This child must be very blessed. For this reason I will call him Paramanandadas, 'Supreme Bliss'."

Later, the astrologer who came to name the newborn according to his horoscope corroborated that the stars also indicated the name Paramanandadas.

Shri Hariray comments: About five hundred years ago, Paramanandadas and many other divine souls appeared in various parts of India. At that time, Lord Krishna gave Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya the order to incarnate upon the earth to uplift these souls. So the poet Gopaldas has sung, "Mahaprabhu travelled throughout India to shower his grace on these souls."

Paramanandadas passed a happy childhood in Kanoja. When he grew older, he blossomed into a great and prolific poet. He was called 'svami' and had his own following in which numbered many other musicians.

Once during a drought, the ruler of Kanoja confiscated all of Paramanandadas's father's wealth. His distressed parents told their poet-son, "We are now too poor to arrange your

marriage. You are able to earn money with your artistic talents. When you have made enough, we will find you a wife.

Paramanandadas replied, "I do not wish to marry. What is the use of collecting money? The fruit of wealth is to feed Vaishnavas, and Brahmans, so I do not hoard paises. I will daily give enough food to eat. You should sit and repeat the Lord's name. You have become penniless to remove your infatuation with money."

Paramanandadas's father replied, "Because you are a renunciate, you think like this. We are householders and need money for our families and other affairs. Only then can I be respected."

Later, his father went to the east and the south of India where he made some money and finally settled. Meanwhile, Paramanandadas sang with his group and his fame spread from town to town.

PARAMANANDADAS MEETS MAHAPRABHU

Once, Paramanandadas went to Prayag for the Maha Makar bath festivals. Every day he would sing, and many people came to listen. At that time, Shri Mahaprabhu resided across the river in Adel. Some people from that town, who happened to hear Paramanandadas's voice told Shri Mahaprabhu about the great poet. Shri Mahaprabhu replied, "It is only proper that he is talented for he is a divine soul."

Shri Mahaprabhu had one disciple, Kapur Kshatriya, whose service was to carry water. Because he had a great love for music, he desired to go to hear Paramanandadas, but feared Shri Mahaprabhu would be displeased if he left the 'seva'.

Before meeting Shri Mahaprabhu, Kapur lived with his rich father, who spent his time with prostitutes. One day the king looted all of his family's wealth and threw Kapur, his mother and father into jail. His father bribed one of the

jailers and they managed to escape. Two or three days later, while passing through a forest, his parents were killed by the king's men. Kapur sat in the forest crying, hungry, thirsty, and unable to walk until Shri Mahaprabhu happened to pass nearby. Shri Mahaprabhu called to him, "Who are you? Why are you sitting alone crying?"

After bowing to Shri Mahaprabhu Kapur explained his plight. Shri Mahaprabhu gave him some water and food. Kapur prayed to Shri Mahaprabhu, "Keep me with you. I will serve you for the rest of my life." Shri Mahaprabhu assured him that he would do so and gave Kapur the service of carrying water. After a few days, Shri Mahaprabhu returned to Adel and there Kapur had the 'darshan' of Shri Mahaprabhu's 'seva' 'svarupa', Shri Navanita Priyaji, the child form of Shri Krishna. Immediately attached to Navanita Priyaji's form, he wished to serve Him. Shri Mahaprabhu, knowing his wish, told him, "It is your great fortune that you wish to serve the Lord. Now carry Navanita Priyaji's water."

From that time, Kapur lovingly performed the Lord's water 'seva', and, after some days, he began to realize Navanita Priyaji's divine form, although he did not have time to hear Paramanandadas sing.

Once, on the eleventh lunar day, one Vaishnava came to Adel to see Shri Mahaprabhu. Kapur asked that Vaishnava about Paramanandadas. The Vaishnava explained, "Paramanandadas sings every night for a few hours, but, since it is the eleventh day, he will sing all night."

Kapur, anxious to hear Paramanandadas, decided to go to Prayag when Shri Mahaprabhu had gone to bed. That night, after Shri Mahaprabhu had given his discourse, Kapur started out for Prayag. Not finding a boat to cross the river, he wore his shawl and 'dhoti' on his head, and swam to the other side where he made his way to the kirtan of Paramanandadas. Because he had never met the poet before, he sat at a distance until some disciple of Shri Mahaprabhu called to

him to sit with them close to the performer. Some other musicians sang before Paramanandadas.

Because Paramanandadas had not seen Shri Mahaprabhu or Shri Nathji, he did not have conscious knowledge of the Lord's 'lila'. Shri Mahaprabhu sent Kapur in order to graec Paramanandadas, for through the association of accomplished devotees, Krishna gives His mercy. Shri Krishna never left Kapur for even a moment. So Suradas has sung about such devotees, "The merciful Lord follows after His 'bhaktas'."

The first song Paramanandadas sang concerned itself with the feelings of the residents of Braja after Krishna had departed for Mathura.

* * * * *

The people of Braja,
Suffering Krishna's separation,
ponder :
"Without Gopal, we stand swindled,
so weak our wasted bodies have become."

From morning to night,
mother Yashoda stares down the road. .
If anyone mentions Krishna's name,
tears flow from her eyes.

Mathura is like a line of kohl :
Whoever passes through it turns black.
Sings Paramanandadas, "To be without the Lord
is like the moon without the stars."

* * * * *

He then sang a poem relating what the Gopis said to Krishna's messenger, Uddhava, when he tried to teach them Yoga.

* * * * *

(The Gopis say to Uddhava)

"In Gokul everyone worships Gopal.

Those who depend upon other spiritual practices
all live in Lord Shiva's city, Banares.

Even if Krishna has left us Lordless,
now why do you try to break
the bonds of our love ?

We will not lose our cool,
even if the moon is grabbed by Rahu.¹

What sin have we committed
that Krishna has sent us instruction
for the practice of Yoga,
ignoring our loving service ?"

Sings Paramanandadas,
"What soul that has felt
would ask only for liberation
and not for his abundant qualities ?"

* * * * *

Then Paramanandadas sang :

* * * * *

"In what impassioned soul can I confide ?
Listen, friend, without the son of Nanda
my pain is beyond words.

1. The moon grabbed by Rahu means a lunar eclipse; times of astrological disturbance is considered to be impure and forbidding.

Where are the enchanting Yamuna banks ?
Where are Yamuna's gushing waters ?

Where is that trysting place
spread over with forest flowers
and soft leaves ?

Where is the touch and sight of Paramanandadas
who has lotus eyes and delicate form ?

* * * * *

He then saag :
"Once I set my eyes on Krishna
my heart was swept away.

I awake the night :
counting doesn't end it.
How to find the morning.

Listen, friend, now how can I live
when I hear the night bird's call ?

How can anyone remove Him from a heart
filled with pure love ?"

Sings Paramanandadas,
"You will meet the Lord, 'sakhi'.¹
Don't beat your brains out."

* * * * *

For the whole night, Paramanandadas sang songs which expressed his mood of separation. An hour and a half before sunrise he stopped singing and everyone returned to their homes. Kapur greeted Paramanandadas with "Jai Shri

1. 'Sakhi' means a female friend and is used affectionately between women.

Krishna" and then returned to Adel thinking that Paramanandadas sang as well as everyone said he did.

Kapur swam across the river, bathed, and returned to Adel where Shri Mahaprabhu had just awakened. He bowed to his guru and he recommenced his water 'seva'.

Krishna inspired Kapur to go to hear Paramanandadas sing, for through this Vaishnava, the Lord was able to shower His grace upon the poet. Otherwise, why would a person who had realized the Lord wish to visit anyone else's home ? Krishna sat on Kapur's lap for the entire evening listening to Paramanandadas's kirtan.

Meanwhile, Paramanandadas, tired from the vigil, went to sleep. Here, someone could question why Paramanandadas lay down to rest just before sunrise, for the fruit of this pious karma, of remaining awake the entire night of a fast day, was lost. Paramanandadas was a divine soul and only used the eleventh day fast as an excuse to sing more of the Lord's names and did not desire a reward for an austerity. The fruit of a vigil can be lost, if done improperly, while singing the Lord's name is always fruitful. He went to sleep before sunrise so that he would be better rested on the following night to sing the Lord's glories. He did not depend upon a vigil as a spiritual means but rather only took the shelter of singing the Lord's names.

While Paramanandadas slept he dreamt he saw Shri Navanita Priyaji sitting on Kapur's lap listening to his singing. Navanita Priyaji laughed and said to Paramanandadas, "Today, after so many days, I have finally heard your kirtan. Shri Mahaprabhu's blessed disciple, Kapur, came to hear you and I accompanied him.

Again, someone might question, that since the Lord hears everything, why did he say that he was hearing Paramanandadas for the first time ? The answer is that the Lord used to listen to Paramanandadas as an inner witness within the poet's heart, but now that Paramanandadas was to be accepted by Shri

Mahaprabhu, the Lord showered His full grace by personally appearing.

When Paramanandadas awoke, the beauty of Krishna's form shimmered in his eyes, beautiful as a million love gods. Knowledge filled his heart, he became anxious to see Krishna again and considered, "For all these days that I have sung the Lord's glories, I have never had such a sight. It was because Kapur came that I was able to behold the Lord. I will go meet Kapur. Then everything will be perfected."

Paramanandadas set out for Adel. Arriving on the Yamuna banks he saw Shri Mahaprabhu performing his morning prayers. At that moment, the poet had a vision of Shri Mahaprabhu as Lord Krishna. So Shri Gusainji has explained in his Vallabhashtak, "Mahaprabhu is actually Krishna."

Paramanandadas was so surprised that he was speechless and thought, "It is not surprising that Krishna sat in Kapur's lap and listened to my kirtan when he has a guru like Shri Mahaprabhu. I will also become Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple. Now I don't feel capable of asking Shri Mahaprabhu to accept me as a follower. Therefore, first I will go to Kapur and tell him of my desire."

Suddenly, Shri Mahaprabhu called out, "Paramanandadas, sing something of the Lord's 'lila.'" Paramanandadas prostrated himself before Shri Mahaprabhu and sang the following song of Krishna's departure from Braja to Mathura.

* * * * *

"How long has it been since Gopal has gone ?"
she repeatedly asked the Braja maidens.

"I have been away,
invited to my parents home."

(She asks one Gopi)

"Sakhi, where has your beauty gone ?

Your lotus face has withered."

(The girl replies)

"All of my fortune has gone with Krishna.
Now my soft heart burns with separation."

(She asks other Gopis about Krishna)

One mumbles something,
another stares blankly,
while a third replies with a perplexed mind,
"Akura¹ has taken everything away."

Krishna, the wealth of Paramanandadas Svami's life.

* * * * *

Then Paramanandadas sang :

* * * * *

"The wish of my heart
remains in my heart,"
cries the dairy maid in the bower.

"I never saw Gopal² again."

(She explains)

"Once, sakhi, while I was on this road
going to sell my curds,

1. Akura, Krishna's uncle, was sent to Braja by king Kamsa to summon Krishna to Mathura to participate in a wrestling match. Kamsa's intention was to kill Krishna. The event in Paramanandadas's poem occurs just after the Lord has left for Mathura. The poet's heart is barren, like Braja then. This feeling of separation intensified his desire for union with God, which ultimately led him to his guru and Krishna realization.
2. Gopal, one of Krishna's names, means protector of the cows or protector of the senses,

Krishna grabbed me, and demanded tax,
though His motive was purely love.

Now, without His sight,
a second seems like an age.
The flames of separation scorch me."

Empty of Krishna,
the eyes of Paramanandadas Svami¹ are flowing rivers.

* * * * *

And then he sang :

* * * * *

The thing is, His lotus petalled eyes.

O friend, again and again I remember
Krishna sending secret love signals,
autumn 'rasa lila',

Him coming covered with the dust of cows,
his enchanting call as if to the cows
but really to me.

These memories I keep within my heart.
What can an outsider know of my pain ?

Paramanandadas can say nothing at all.
His heart is choked.

* * * * *

1. At this time in Paramanandadas's life he was a 'svami', a spiritual master with many disciples and, therefore, signed his poems Paramanandadas Svami, Lord of Supreme Bliss. After accepting Mahaprabhu as his guru, he signed most of his poems, Paramanandadas, 'the servant of Supreme Bliss',

Finally he sang :

* * * * *

I remember his lotus-petal eyes.
I shed constant tears,
I am so restless
for the joy of Vrindavan's love.

His close embrace
in the bower gardens and forest havens.
How can I wipe these thoughts from my mind ?

His beautiful sleep,
his 'rasa' play in the bower dwelling
from whence the useless Cupid¹ has been expelled.

Those who have been nourished
by the sweet words of Paramanandadas's Lord,
how can they live without Him ?

* * * * *

In this way, Paramanandadas sang songs of separation in front of Shri Mahaprabhu. Shri Mahaprabhu then called out to him, "Sing something about the Lord's child 'lila'."

With folded hands Paramanandadas prayed, "I don't understand anything about the Lord's child 'lila'."

Shri Mahaprabhu then advised him, "Bathe in the Yamuna river. After, I will explain to you."

Paramanandadas then asked, "Where is your disciple, Kapur ?"

1. Cupid represents worldly love, lust and passion. Only the highest expression of the amorous mood remains in Krishna's divine garden,

Shri Mahaprabhu replied, "He is making 'seva'."

Paramanandadas went to the Yamuna river to bathe while Shri Mahaprabhu returned home and awoke Navanita Priyaji. Paramanandadas met Kapur at the Yamuna where the disciple was fetching water. Paramanandadas blissfully said with folded hands, "Last night you graced our vigil and Lord Krishna sat on your lap and listened to my kirtan. When I went to sleep I had the Lord's sight and he told me, 'Today I listened to your kirtan.' You have showered your grace upon me. For this reason I have come to see you. Now tell me how I can become Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple and how I can have the Lord's sight every day."

Kapur told Paramanandadas, "Shri Mahaprabhu has given you his grace which has allowed you to have such a divine sight. Shri Mahaprabhu has already said that he will initiate you so quickly bathe and go before him, but don't tell him how I visited you last night, for he might be angry that I left the Lord's 'seva'."

Paramanandadas then bathed in the Yamuna river and followed Kapur to the temple. At that time, Shri Mahaprabhu had completed Shri Nathji's ornamentation and made his offering. Shri Mahaprabhu told Paramanandadas, "Sit." Paramanandadas bowed to Shri Mahaprabhu and took a seat. Shri Mahaprabhu took away the Lord's offering and in front of Shri Navanita Priyaji, the guru initiated the poet and explained to him the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagavata.

Shri Mahaprabhu asked Paramanandadas to sing songs of the Lord's child 'lila' for in them lies the mood of union while the songs Paramanandadas first sang were of separation. Upon experiencing the mood of union, the fruit of separation is achieved. While Krishna made 'lila' with the Gopis, he suddenly disappeared which allowed them to receive the fruit of separation.

Thus, the Lord said, "Those who have found a fortune and then lose a fortune think a lot about that fortune."

When Paramanandadas said, "I don't understand the Lord's child 'lila'." it is revealed that he had not yet experienced the mood of union. Because he was a divine soul, he sang songs of separation until he was initiated, at which point his ignorance was despatched. As Shri Mahaprabhu explained to him the tenth canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam he began to experience the Lord's form and all of his 'lilas'. Shri Mahaprabhu placed the ocean of the Shrimad Bhagavatam in the heart of Paramanandadas. Although Shri Mahaprabhu had many disciples, only Paramanandadas and Suradas were oceans, for their poetry was unlimited. Then Paramanandadas sang songs of Krishna's child 'lila'.¹

* * * * *

O friend,
the beautiful lotus-eyed Shyam
swings in the cradle.
All the Braja maidens sing his child 'lilas'.

The jewel-like nails
of Krishna's red tender lotus feet
are brilliant like the sun.

His curly locks
are like lines of black bees.
A necklace strung with large pearls
swings on his neck.

-
1. There are two types of separation. The first the poet experiences before union with God, before he has met his guru or seen Krishna; the second after he has realized Krishna. In the latter, Paramanandadas's contemplation of Krishna's many pastimes and attributes generate the highest joy. Once union has occurred, the 'bhakta' always knows Krishna and separation from the Beloved intensifies his experience of Him,

Krishna grabs his toe with his lotus hand
and puts it in his mouth.

Seeing his reflection,
he laughs and laughs.

Queen Yashodha looks at her heap of fortune,
her darling son.¹

Paramanandadas Svami nourishes
love for young Gopal.

* * * * *

Then he sang :

* * * * *

“Yashoda, your fortune is beyond description.

That form which Brahma and other gods
have difficulty realizing
has now appeared for you.

Shiva, Narada, and Sanaka and other great sages
try to find a way to meet Him.

The same Lord, Nanda's son,
covered with dust,
wraps his hands around your neck.”

She sees Krishna's smiling face
as He rests in the jeweled cradle

1. Paramanandadas, like Sur, is known for his particular attraction to Krishna's childhood play.

and says,
“Swing my son, I'll celebrate.”
Paramanandadas celebrates.

* * * * *

In Nanda's jewel-laden courtyard
the two brothers play,
the fair Baladeva paired
with the Child Krishna.

Their golden anklet bells ring out,
enticing the beautiful women of Braja,¹
turning the god of lust shy.

With them are their attentive mothers,
Yashodha and Rohini.

The small lad dances
to the snapping of fingers.

To see him adorned in blue and yellow cloths
enthalls me.

Filled with the joy of child's amusement
Paramanandadas sings.

* * * * *

The women of Braja sing the praises
of the beloved Lord.

“In Nanda's jewel-covered courtyard
the child crawls and has fun.

1. The Gopis simultaneously behold Him as a lovely infant and as their lover. Paramanandadas enjoyed these paradoxical attributes of Krishna and has written many poems intertwining different devotional moods,

My Chhagan Magan¹ falls and falls
and then lifts himself
with the support of his hands and knees.

Mother Yashoda takes her dust-covered son,
her vessel of love,
into her lap.

The Lord, who was not inept
in measuring the three worlds²
in three steps,
now has difficulty
crossing the door still.

Paramanandadas's Lord,
fond of His devotees,
is draped in a necklace
with a lovely tiger's claw³ pendant.

* * * * *

Paramanandadas sang many songs about the Lord's child 'lila' and pleased Shri Mahaprabhu greatly. Later, Paramanandadas lived with Shri Mahaprabhu at Adel. There, Shri Mahaprabhu advised Paramanandadas, "Sing poems through-

1. Chhagan 'Magan' is an affectionate name for the Child Krishna which means 'perfectly filled with the six divine qualities of valour, lordship, prosperity, fame, knowledge, and renunciation'.
2. Krishna, during his incarnation as the Divine Dwarf asked the demon, King Bali, for all the land he could traverse in three steps. Bali, not recognizing the supplicator to be the Lord, granted the request, whereupon Krishna expanded to an enormous form that covered the entire creation in two steps. Now, as Child Krishna, the same Lord is an infant on His hands and knees. Again Paramanandadas plays with Krishna's contradictory qualities.
3. Krishna's mother, Yashoda, adorned her son with a tiger pendant believed to ward off the evil eye and bad omens.

out the day for Navanita Priyaji. This is the 'seva' I give you."

Paramanandadas daily wrote new poems and sang them from dawn to dusk. When this 'seva' was completed, Paramanandadas would sing before Shri Mahaprabhu about the Braja 'lilas'. When Shri Mahaprabhu would give his commentary on the Shrimad Bhagavatam, Shri Subodhini, Paramanandadas would compose songs about what Shri Mahaprabhu had explained, and then he would sing them for his guru.

PARAMANANDADAS GOES TO BRAJA

One day, Paramanandadas heard of the greatness of the Lord's lotus feet from Shri Mahaprabhu and composed a poem about them, which he sang before his guru. This is the poem he sang :

* * * * *

I bow to the lotus feet
of the Lord of the world
who runs with Lords of cows.

Those lotus feet covered with dust
the Gopis grasp to their hearts.

Those lotus feet Yudhistar¹ worshipped
and the sun god follows.

Those lotus feet have been in India
by Pitam and Bisham.

Those lotus feet are kept within
the lotus hearts of Shiva and other seers.

1. A great righteous king and Krishna's 'bhakta'.

Those lotus feet are the ornament
of his consort's heart
and are extolled by the Vedas, Bhagavata and sages.

Those lotus feet purify the world
and were placed upon Bali Raja's back.

Of those lotus feet,
the servant of Paramananda sings,
filled with the nectar of love.¹

* * * * *

Afterwards, Paramanandadas prayed to Shri Mahaprabhu
in the following poem.

* * * * *

O beloved of the Gopis,
I request these things :

To have a human birth,
and the Lord's 'seva',
I would appreciate residence in Braja.

To remain at the feet of Shri Vallabh and his lineage
and to be called a servant of the Vaishnavas;

To bathe daily in Shri Yamuna's waters
and with my mind, action, and speech
to praise Lord Krishna :

-
1. Here, two different moods are expressed : the first, Krishna is worshipped in His sweet form, as the divine cowlad, the son of Yashoda, the beloved of Gopis, forever pleasing blessed devotees who follow the Path of Grace. The second, Krishna, in His awesome majestic form, adorned by kings and seers who come to know of His greatness through the Path of Law.

To daily listen to the Shrimad Bhagavatam
and not to leave it nor take anything else.

Paramanandadas requests
always to see and never be blind.¹

* * * * *

After hearing Paramanandadas sing of his wish for the sight of Braja, Shri Mahaprabhu thought that Paramanandadas should definitely go there so he began to make plans for a pilgrimage to Braja. Accompanied by Paramanandadas, Krishnadas, Damodardas, and other Vaishnavas, Shri Mahaprabhu left for Braja. On the way, they passed through Paramanandadas's town of Kanauja. There, Paramanandadas requested Shri Mahaprabhu to visit his home and bought all the foodstuffs necessary for the offering. After Shri Mahaprabhu prepared the Lord's meals and had taken 'prasada', he requested Paramanandadas to sing Shri Krishna's glories. Paramanandadas considered, "Shri Mahaprabhu's mind is absorbed in Shri Nathji's (Shri Krishna's) Braja 'lila', therefore, I will sing a poem of separation, for his every moment must be like an age."

He sang :

* * * * *

O Krishna, I remember your 'lila'.

My mind and heart picture the lotus eyes
of the one who entices my heart.

-
1. This is the first poem in which we see Paramanandadas express his complete surrender to God. He requests from the Beloved of the Gopis these things for he knows they can be given only through grace. This humility allows the poet the sight of Krishna's sporting grounds, the Braja land.

How can I forget his tenderness
the one time I met him ?

His laugh, his side long glances,
I love his alluring gait.

Sometimes she deeply embraces the night,
other times she sings like a cuckoo.
Sometimes, totally obsessed,
she calls out, "Where are you ! Where are you !"
and starts running as if with the Lord.

Sometimes she closes her eyes
and adorns the Lord
with a garland from her heart.

"By meditating on Shyam," sings Paramanandadas,
"The period of separation some how passes."

* * * * *

As soon as Paramanandadas sang the first line of the poem, "O Krishna, I remember your 'lila'," Mahaprabhu became engrossed in Krishna's divine pastimes, his body, unconscious.

Shri Gusainji has described Shri Mahaprabhu as "The moon of Shri Vrindavan who has manifested the highest bliss of intimate 'lila'. He is an ocean which surges with the nectar of 'rasa' and other 'lilas'." Elsewhere Shri Gusainji has described Shri Mahaprabhu as "Attached to the 'rasa lila'." The gist of everything Shri Mahaprabhu has written is the 'rasa lila' and nothing else.

For three days, Shri Mahaprabhu remained unaware of the physical world. Damodardas and other Vaishnavas who understood Shri Mahaprabhu's form just sat there and watched him.

On the fourth day, Shri Mahaprabhu opened his eyes and all the Vaishnavas rejoiced, and Paramanandadas decided to never sing another song like that before his guru.

Shri Mahaprabhu remained unconscious for three days because 'rasa' is performed in three main places : Shri Vrindavan, Shri Giriraja, and Shri Yamunaji. For one day, Shri Mahaprabhu experienced the Lord's 'lila' on the Shri Giriraja hill and the way Krishna played in the caves. As Chatrabhujadas has sung, "In the deep caves of the Govardhana Hill, Krishna and His consort have spent the night."

The second day, Shri Mahaprabhu experienced the bower 'lilas' of Vrindavan, while on the third day he saw the Lord's dalliance in the Yamuna river. He then came back to this earth to give the experience of the bliss of 'lila' to other souls.

Paramanandadas worried that if Shri Mahaprabhu became too absorbed in the Lord's 'lila', he might not return to earth. Then how would he uplift all the divine souls who had taken birth upon the earth at this time ?

Shri Mahaprabhu is the form of separation. Shri Gusainji has described him, "For experiencing the Lord's divine separation he taught to renounce everything else." One comes to know the mood of separation when everything worldly and Vedic is forgotten.

When Shri Mahaprabhu regained consciousness, Paramanandadas sang:

* * * * *

Friend, I sing of that auspicious bliss.

Krishna is the wishing jewel of Gokul.

Whatever you ask for is received,
Since that lotus-eyed one has come to Braja,

all wealth has flourished.

Look, by Nanda's door
stand the eight supernatural powers.

Vrindavan, where the wishing cow is milked,
is always blooming.

One need only ask the clouds
for rain to shower.
Through Krishna's grace we live.

Yashoda explains to the Gopis
the greatness of Hari
while Paramanandadas relishes
his enticing flute.¹

* * * * *

After Shri Mahaprabhu had taken 'prasada' and rested,
Paramanandadas sang another poem in front of his guru :

How pure the glorises of Vrindavan's moon.²
What is the light of the sun and moon
compared to my Govinda ?

Yashoda explains to someone
the splendor of her bliss mine.
Paramanandadas's Lord
plays and romps with the other cowlads.

* * * * *

1. It is interesting here that His mother, Yashoda, focuses on her son's celebrity, but Paramanandadas concentrates only on the sweetest aspect of Krishna. What emanates from the flute is called the nectar of Krishna's lips, the most desired fruit and is enjoyed by the beloved dairy maids.

2. Krishna is often called the moon.

Then Paramanandadas sang:

* * * * *

Sakhi, let's go and live in Nandagam.

We will laugh and play in the cowpen
with Vrindavan's moon.

We live in Baten full of pleasure
but for the pain
that Krishna lives so far away.¹

There we will hide and see Him steal butter.
See, my friend, how fruitful life will be.

My eyes are like the fish,
every moment they thirst for the Lord's sight.

Says Paramanandadas, this love is difficult.

* * * * *

After hearing that poem, Shri Mahaprabhu said, "Let's proceed to Braja. Afterwards Paramanandadas brought all of his disciples to Shri Mahaprabhu and requested, "Accept these souls." Shri Mahaprabhu questioned, "These are all of your followers. Now why do you want them to become my own ?"

Paramanandadas explained, "Before, I thought I was a svami, a spiritual master, and therefore made a following. Now, I am your das, your servant. The title svami lends beauty to one who is truly a lord, but if a servant tries to

1. Krishna's town of Nandagam is only a few miles from Baten, the town where these Gopis live, yet they derive joy only from his most immediate proximity.

become a svami, he is a fool. In a state of ignorance, I made disciples. Now, accept and liberate them."¹

Shri Mahaprabhu finally agreed and initiated all of them before setting out for Braja.

After some days, they arrived in Gokul, and there, on the Govinda Ghat, they bathed and sat under a tree, which to this day still stands. Later Shri Mahaprabhu taught Paramanandadas his Yamunastak :

* * * * *

"I joyfully bow to you,
Shri Yamunaji,
who gladly gives all divine powers.

Your sands shine like Krishna's lotus feet,
and exceed your waters.

On your banks lie fresh forests.
Flowers make fragrant your flow.
Full of the beauty of Krishna,
you are worshipped by Gods and demons.

From the peak of the Kalindi mountains
you surge white with foam.

Filled with delight
you fury on your way.

Noisily, you ride up and down the rocks
seeming to be in the finest swing.

1. Indeed, it is rare that a guru would give his disciples to another teacher. This is another indication of the poet's absolute surrender to Shri Mahaprabhu.

Glories to Yamunaji, the daughter of the sun,
who increases love for Krishna.

To purify the world
you appeared upon the earth.

Parrots, peacocks and swans
serve you with their plentiful calls,
as if your beloved friends.

Your waves are like bangles
embedded with your pearl sands.
Your beautiful banks are your thighs.

To Krishna's fourth beloved, Shri Yamunaji,
I bow.

You, embellished by countless virtues,
Shiva, Brahma, and other gods extol.

Your hue is always like that of a clump of clouds.
You have fulfilled the wishes of
Dhurva, Parashara and others.

By your pure Mathura banks
you are encircled by all the Gopis and cowlads.

O Yamunaji, who has taken the shelter of Krishna,
ocean of grace,
always appear blissfully in my heart.

From your confluence
the Ganges river became beloved of Shri Krishna
and capable of giving devotees all powers.

Who can compare with you ?
Only Shri Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth,

your co-wife,
but even she is somewhat less.

The Lord's beloved Shri Yamunaji,
always remain in my heart.

I always bow to you, Shri Yamunaji.
Your personality is most amazing.

Those who sip your waters
are never afflicted
by the god of retribution,
Yama, your brother,
for how could he kill his sister's own children ?

As the Gopis became Krishna's beloved ones
by pleasing him,
so, by pleasing you,
devotees become beloved of Krishna.

O, Shri Yamunaji, through your proximity
may I receive a new body
which will make love for Krishna easy.

So, I adore you.

From your connection,
the Ganges river became famous
throughout the world.

But Pushti devotees
would never worship Gangaji alone.

Beloved, co-wife of Shri Lakshmi,
how can one praise you ?
Lakshmi, when worshipped with Hari,
grants liberation,
but your story is greater,

The sweat of all the Gopis' bodies
mixes with your waters.

O, daughter of the sun, Shri Yamunaji,
all the sins of those
who joyfully read this poem
are wiped out
and Krishna becomes pleased with them.

They have love for Krishna
and receive all powers.

Their nature becomes transformed.
So says the beloved of Hari, Shri Vallabhacharya."¹

* * * * *

After Paramanandadas learned Yamunastak, Yamunaji's
divine form enlightened his heart and he sang of her glories.

* * * * *

Shri Yamunaji,
may I receive this grace :

-
1. This is one of Mahaprabhu's most famous writings and is memorized to this day by thousands of his followers. Mahaprabhu praises the river, for it is through her grace that divine souls are brought to Krishna.

In the Shrimad Bhagavatam, it is revealed that when the unmarried Gopis wanted to marry Krishna, they worshipped the divine river and their wishes were fulfilled. Again, when Krishna disappeared from the Gopis during the celebrated 'rasa' dance, their beloved only reappeared to them when they reached the Yamuna banks, where they danced and made water spots with the Blessed Lord.

The Yamuna river has three forms. One as the river which everyone can see. Secondly, as the purifier who transforms her 'bhaktas' and makes them fit to receive Krishna's love, and lastly as Krishna's beloved consort,

To remain close to you every day
singing Ram and Krishna's glories.

May your sanctifying water cleanse me,
purifying my thought and removing strife.

Through your grace, daughter of the sun,
love for Krishna's feet will increase.

I pray to you and request
that I foreget all ignoble association.

Says Paramanandadas,
"Yamunaji, the bestower of all fruit,
may I love Krishna."

* * * * *

He then sang another poem in praise of the divine river.

* * * * *

Shri Yamunaji,
know me to be humble and give me this :
Let Nanda's son always be my husband
and me, the servant of the Gopis.

You are so generous, a treasure chest of grace.
Grant joy to those who take shelter at your feet.

Krishna is always in your dominion.

You daily abide with the Holder of the countain.

The women of Braja all play with Krishna,
doing that amazing 'rasa' dance
on your banks.

Admist the bower trees, lotuses, and flowers
is a heap of bliss.

Perspiring, the beautiful women of Braja,
bathe and play in your water.

Again and again, the maidens get splashed.
They appear like stars around the moon.

O Yamunaji, I daily bow at your feet
and will do any chores for you.

Says Paramanandadas, "I am your hand-maiden.
Your lotus feet grant such pleasure."

* * * * *

And then he sang:

* * * * *

O Kalindi,¹ you remove the evil
of this age of struggle.

Daughter of the sun,
sister of Yama,
Yamunaji, very beautiful woman,
the wife of Govinda.

Glories to you, Yamunaji,
beloved of Shri Krishna.

Sinners are cleansed
and ford you to leave this worldly existence.

Those who take your shelter
you make fearless.

A mother like you could never neglect
the welfare of her children.

1. A name of Yamunaji.

Filled with nectar,
cool, fragrant, and gentle,
your form as a river
descended upon the earth.

Says Paramanandadas, "You are the great purifier.

In every age, the Vedas testify to your wonder."

* * * * *

Shri Mahaprabhu was pleased to hear Paramanandadas's praises of Shri Yamunaji and then allowed him to see Shri Krishna's child 'lila' at Gokul. Paramanandadas saw Krishna playing many delightful games with the Gopis who were fetching Yamuna water. He sang the following poem:¹

* * * * *

Shri Chandrawali Gopi went to the Yamuna ghat
to fetch water.

On the way,
she found the Dark Cloud playing.

Their eyes made contact,
her charmed heart became the abode
of Krishna's form.

She could not take a step.

In that first encounter,
love appeared.

She met Paramananda.

1. Now that Paramanandadas has received the grace of the divine river, he begins to praise the pastimes of Krishna with the Gopis. Her grace has allowed the 'first encounter'.

like an ant sticks to molasses.

* * * * *

Then he sang:

* * * * *

"Lad, could you support my arm a little.
On this decrepit ghat
I am unable to draw water
for I might slip into the Yamuna river."

Perceiving the form
of the beautiful lotus petal-eyed Shyam
the Gopi was entangled.

As love's yearning surged in her heart
Krishna recognized her.

The Lord of Braja laughed
and took her hand
as if to keep her jug from falling.

Says Paramanandadas, "The clever Gopi
likes the touch of the lotus-eyed one."¹

* * * * *

After that Paramanandadas sang many poems of
Krishna's child 'lilas' in Gokul.

* * * * *

1. These poems are landmarks for Paramanandadas, for they reveal how the poet has relished the intimate amorous mood with Shri Krishna.

The Gopis sing with mellifluous voices
of the Lord of the three worlds
who lives in the house of Nanda and Yashoda.

The goddess of knowledge,
sages, seers,
Narada, and others
sing of him.

Brahma, the world's creator, sings,
Shesh, with a thousand heads, sings.

With mind, action, speech, and love
at his lotus feet
now Paramanandadas sings.

* * * * *

Then he sang:

* * * * *

The Gopis come to Yashoda's house
to dispell the anguish of the day.

They gaze and gaze upon his lotus face.

He grabs the door still as he tries to cross it.

The Gopis chatter to him
and giggle among themselves.

With two hands,
Yashoda waves salt and mustard seeds
around her child.¹

1. This is done to prevent any bad omen or evil eye from hurting Krishna.

and offers him her mind, body, and wealth.

She picks him up,
hugs him tightly to her breast.
Under the sway of love her eyes close.

She carries him to the cradle
and puts to sleep her tired Beautiful Cloud.

The Gopis all bless Krishna :
"Live as long as the Ganges and Yamuna rivers."

Paramanandadas's Krishna,
affectionate with his 'bhaktas',
excites the hearts of his 'bhaktas'.¹

* * * * *

Every limb of the holder of the mountain is crooked.
His gait is crooked.

How did this handsome dandy come to Gokul ?

His eyebrow is crooked.
The movement of his feet is crooked
and his heart is crooked.

Paramanandadas's Lord
covers all the narrow alleys of Braja.²

* * * * *

1. Certainly one of Paramanandadas's finest lines. This poem is generally sung around the time of Krishna's appearance day festivals. Krishna is not only affectionate with his 'bhaktas' but instills in their heart the great desire to meet and dally with the Lord.
2. Paramanandadas teases that Krishna is crooked but he means it in a divine sense, not straight forward, and thus, esoteric difficult to grasp.

Paramanandadas sang these and other poems and became very attached to Gokul. Once he went before Shri Mahaprabhu and sang of his wish to remain at his guru's lotus feet in Gokul, to have Krishna's sight every day, and to experience all of His 'lilas'. Paramanandadas sang:

* * * * *

This I ask of Yashoda's son :
That my heart be like a black bee
at your lotus feet,
and my eyes behold your splendor.

Give me the worship of your lotus feet.
Your two bodies shine like lightning in a cloud.

The son of Nanda and the daughter of Brishabhan
are my life's entire breath and wealth.

To live in Braja
and to drink Yamunaji's waters,
to serve Shri Vallabh is my oath.

To find the great 'prashada'
and to sing the qualities of Krishna.
Sings the maid servant Paramanandadas.¹

* * * * *

1. Paramanandadas calls himself the maid servant for it is through 'sribhava' the mood of divine femininity, of acceptivity that Krishna is found. This is not feminine in any worldly sense, but rather signifies a surrendered devotional attitude towards the Lord which is of course achievable by men and women alike. It permits grace to fill the soul.

And then he sang:

* * * * *

This I ask of Sankarshan's brother :
To have constant love for your lotus feet
and to enjoy the gathering of 'bhaktas'.

Give me the association of Krishna's devotees
and residence at Vrindavan
on the banks of the Yamuna.

To listen to the nectar of Krishna stories
and to meditate upon the body of Shyam.

To have all the wishes of my heart fulfilled
and to bathe in Yamunaji's pure water.

Paramanandadas's Krishna
is the hero of Gokul
and in every way enduring.

* * * * *

PARAMANANDADAS SINGS BEFORE SHRI NATHJI

Shri Mahaprabhu was very pleased to hear Paramanandadas's poem. Shri Mahaprabhu then accompanied by a group of Vaishnavas, left Gokul and travelled to the Govardhan Hill. In the afternoon, they arrived, and Shri Mahaprabhu, after bathing, entered Shri Nathji's temple atop the hill. Paramanandadas also bathed and, after bowing down to the Govardhana Hill, climbed it and entered the temple. There he had Shri Nathji's sight during the afternoon period of 'Utthapan'. Beholding Shri Nathji, Paramanandadas became attached to His form. Shri Mahaprabhu then called to Paramanandadas, "Paramanandadas, sing something of the Lord's 'lila' so Shri Nathji can hear."

Paramanandadas considered, "What shall I sing ? I have one tongue and Shri Nathji's form and 'lila' are unlimited. I am unable to think of anything, but because Shri Mahaprabhu has requested, I should sing something. I will first recite a poem of the Lord's incarnation, then His bower 'lila', the glories of His lotus feet, and finally a description of His form.

* * * * *

The Supreme has appeared
as the enticing one, Nanda's lad,
the hero of the intimate glade,
the incarnation for the benefit of His 'bhaktas'.

First I will bow to the lotus feet
of the Dark Cloud, Gopal,
whose cheeks are adorned
with alligator-shaped earrings,
whose eyes are attractive and wide.

With his brother, Balaram,
he makes amusing play.

The Vedas describe Hari,
"Not that, not that,"
while I am the das of Paramananda.¹

* * * * *

After singing that poem Paramanandadas sang about his attachment to Shri Krishna.

* * * * *

O friend,
my heart trusts Krishna.

1. 'Neti, neti', 'not that, not that' the Vedas proclaim as they reject all the Lord's material qualities, while Paramanandadas adorns the Lord of Supreme Joy, who abounds in transcendental qualities.

From one meeting,
my heart has merged with that boy.
I have abandoned the rules of the world and Vedas
and call Him to me.

Because of this one, Govinda,
everyone has become my enemy.
My friend, like water mixed with milk,
how can I separate from Him ?

Says Paramanandadas,
"You will meet Giridhar.
Yes, you already know him."

* * * * *

I have bound my heart to Krishna,
and severed all other ties.
I dance unconcerned about my veil
and have shed all worldly shame.

I have stopped thinking
about the past and future,
and now, in the middle of the path,
I break my jug.

Tell me, my friend, what you want.
What is the difference if anyone
turns their face from me ?

With the darling beloved Krishna
this body has been drenched in the color of love.

Says Paramanandadas, "Let them laugh
for I have broken from the world and Vedas.¹

* * * * *

Lal², I enjoy your banter.
To hear it, I come and go
again and again to the house of Yashoda.

Lal, the neighbors ridicule me
and accuse me of things too.
Lal, God knows why I'm lured to run to you.

Lal, in your love I forget to churn the curds
and do the household chores.
Lal, beloved youth, god of supreme bliss,
seeing you I discover satisfaction.

* * * * *

After Shri Mahaprabhu had made the Lord's evening
'arti', Paramanandadas sang :

* * * * *

In the decorated palace
Govinda lies with Radha.
The full moon rises in the autumn night.
Multifarious multi-colored paintings
depict countless love positions.

-
1. These last two poems are called 'hilaga poems' in which the poet's heart is stuck to Krishna.
 2. Lal is an affectionate name with which the Gopis addressed Krishna.

Behold, behold the couple's transported sport,
an extract of nectar.
Enraptured, they smear each other with sandal paste.
With a flower fan the 'sakhi' cools Paramananda.

* * * * *

Shri Mahaprabhu was pleased to hear Paramanandadas's poem. After Shri Mahaprabhu put Shri Nathji to sleep, he came down from the temple and told the priest, "Give Paramanandadas some 'prasada' milk."

Paramanandadas, finding the milk too hot, cooled it before drinking it. Later, when Paramanandadas went before Shri Mahaprabhu, the guru asked him, "How was the milk?"

Paramanandadas replied, "It was very hot."

Shri Mahaprabhu then called all the temple cooks, "Why do you offer steaming milk? It should be offered at a good drinking temperature."

The cooks agreed, "From now on we will only offer cooled milk."

Shri Nathji loves milk; it is the substance which connects 'bhaktas' to his 'lila'. Shri Mahaprabhu, in giving some of this nectar, also wanted to ascertain that the offering was good, for if a Vaishnava like Paramanandadas enjoyed the 'prasada', he could be sure that Krishna too had been pleased.

After drinking that nectar milk, Paramanandadas, for the entire night, remained absorbed in Krishna's 'lila' and sang the following songs :

* * * * *

Upon seeing Shri Radha's full moon face,

the ocean of bliss swells in Krishna's body
and overflows into Braja and Vrindavan.
There it is stopped by the Yamuna river,
here by the Gopis.

A little is spread throughout the three worlds.
It does not touch practitioners
of the paths of work and knowledge,
but stays inside the hearts
of those who savor the highest mood.

For 'bhaktas', every moment
'lila' leisurely emerges from their adept minds.
By the grace of Nanda's son,
a little of the flow is seen in those
with Paramananda.

* * * * *

I live for the sight of the beloved's face.
For the ineffable pleasure of his eyes
I endure all pain.

Listen, Gopal, I fall at your feet,
even if I tumble down to ignobility.
I've become attached to your form,
my great fortune to have found.

You are a hero with many lovers,
the preeminent jewel among the wise.
Take firm hold of my arm.

Sings Paramanandadas,

"Enchanter of the heart,
from you comes sustenance."

* * * * *

What nectar did the Gopis gulp?
From Krishna's proximity,
they looted love and passion.

Seeing Nanda's son's form,
expunged their worldly shame.
Paramananda erased the ocean of
Vedic restriction.

* * * * *

Because of him, I forsook my home
and took to the forest.
Eye nectar, ear nectar, speech nectar,
every nectar is found in the son of Nanda.

He takes my hand
and puts his arm around my shoulder.
Together we sing.
In the unequalled frolic of the 'rasa' dance
Krishna is content.

Sakhi, I cannot describe this joy.
When I see him,
I can't recall my pain.

With great fortune, one can unite
with the master of Supreme Bliss.

* * * * *

* * * * *

Ambrosia has been concentrated into one place
and formed your visage,
a nectar moon.

Since then, the creator has not made another.

Listen, Radha,
what comparison can I make ?
The beautiful Shyam has become the Chakor bird
and drinks with veneration your countenance.

Passion governs longing Krishna.
What limb shall I extol ?
Your fresh virtues,
your perfect form.

You have stolen the mind
of the Lord of Supreme Bliss.
His eyes are bound by thirsty love.

* * * * *

I celebrate over Krishna's form.

I stare and stare at their dark and fair forms
in the fresh bower haven.

Shower your grace and do this much :
Uplift this soul.

Sings Paramanandadas,
"When I meet my Lord
all other pursuits are abandoned."

* * * * *

In this way, for the entire night Paramanandadas experienced the Lord's 'lila' and sang many poems. The following morning Shri Mahaprabhu bathed and entered the temple and awoke Shri Nathji. At that time he sang :

* * * * *

Gopal, awake, let me see your face.
Afterwards, I'll do my daily household chores.
The night has vanished,
the sky is red, the sun ascends.
Around the lotuses the black bees hover.
Awake, Krishna,
the bards standing at your door
pronounce your fame
and exalt the opulent diversity
of the 'lila' of Hari's incarnation.

The form of Paramanandadas's Lord, Gopal,
is most auspicious.
The Vedas and Puranas
extol his matchless 'lila'.

* * * * *

And then he sang :

* * * * *

(A gopi says to Yashoda)

"I have come to see Krishna's countenance.
Yesterday, on the way to sell my curds,
I saw his face.

The day yielded double profits to my home :
I sold the yogurt and a black calf was born.
I have run here and stopped my friends outside.
Quickly awake Krishna."

Hearing the Gopi's words, Krishna sat up, laughed,
and called her close.

To that clever dairy maid,
Paramanand hinted at an evening rendezvous.

* * * * *

The beloved lotus-eyed Krishna
eats his breakfast.

Behind him, at a distance,
he hears the voice of a milk maid
and puts not another morsel
in his mouth.

"Ma," he exclaims,
"I have left a calf
of one of the cows in the forest."
Not taking his flute,
not taking his stick,
not even hurriedly calling his friends,
he leaves.

Bewildered Yashoda muses,
"Was it true or was it a dream?"

Krishna, king of the three worlds,
above whose head is a royal canopy
cannot quell his body's flush.

Sitting in the dense bower,
he does many things he wants to do,

Says Paramanandadas,
"The ingenious milk maid finds herself
atop the Holder of the Mountain."

* * * * *

Shri Mahaprabhu gave Paramanandadas the service of
singing poems to Shri Nathji. Paramanandadas composed
new poems every day to his Lord.

Once, a king who was a disciple of Shri Mahaprabhu
accompanied by his wife, pilgrimaged to Braja. After the
King had Shri Nathji's sight, he told his queen, "Go, have
the splendid sight of Shri Nathji on top the Govardhana
Hill."

The queen replied, "I will veil myself, for it is our
custom."

The king replied, "In Braja, in the presence of Shri
Krishna, women go unveiled."

The King tried to convince his wife, but still she would
not agree. The king then approached Shri Mahaprabhu and
said, "Although I have explained at great length to my wife
that she shouldn't veil herself before Shri Nathji, she refuses
to heed me."

Shri Mahaprabhu consoled him, "Let her go veiled. She
can have 'darshan' before everyone else."

Later, the queen covered her face and entered the
'darshan' which was especially for her. Shri Nathji got up
from his throne and opened the temple doors. The crowd
awaiting 'darshan' poured in and, in the rush, the queen's cloth
fell, and she was ashamed. Later, she related the incident to
her husband who replied, "I told you before that Shri Nathji
is the Lord of Braja and no one covers herself before Him."

At that time, Paramanandadas sang one verse in front of
Shri Mahaprabhu ;

What kind of play is this !

Krishna doesn't follow

anyone's rules.

Hearing that, Shri Mahaprabhu told Paramanandadas,
"Don't sing it like that, say, 'How great is this kind of play.'"

Because Paramanandadas had been given the post of Krishna's servant, Shri Mahaprabhu told him to sing the line in the mood of servitude, rather than in the mood of friendship, with the Lord. The latter feeling would come through the Lord's grace and then only could one speak with Krishna as an equal. Any person trying to enter a mood without qualification will fall.¹

Paramanandadas then sang :

* * * * *

(A Gopi complains to Yashoda)

How great is this kind of play !

Krishna doesn't follow anyone's rules.

He gives the monkeys rice pudding mixed with ghee.

Anyone who tries to stop him

gets an angry glare.

In others' homes he romps around,

and gives their things away.

Listen, Yashoda, about your son's nature.

He takes large and small jugs of yogurt

and breaks them in the courtyard.

How can I sustain such losses every day ?

1. It seems to me that Shri Mahaprabhu is not saying this directly to Paramanandadas, but rather to others, for the guru had already established the intimate mood in Paramanandadas's heart.

Yashoda stands and laughs

and covers her lotus face

with her hands.

Paramanandadas says,

"Child Krishna knows very well

the reason why she came."

* * * * *

Through his guru's grace he composed thousands of poems and within his poems about child Krishna shimmers the mood of the intimate lilas. Whatever divine lila he experienced, he sang about.

PARAMANANDADAS MEETS SURADAS

One day, Suradas, Kumbhandas, Ramdas and other bhaktas got together to meet Paramanandadas at his home. Seeing the group of devotees at his home, he became very pleased and thought, "Today I am very blessed. The great bhaktas have come here to shower their grace over me. These devotees are actually all the Lord's form for He lives in their hearts. Today the Lord has truly blessed me. After greeting them and giving them all esteemed seat to rest upon he sang :

* * * * *

Come beloveds of Nandanandana (Krishna)

Wearing sacred tulsi necklaces

and lovely tilaks you are the splendour

of the three worlds.

Within your hearts

love constantly dwells

never leaving for a moment.

In the middle of your lotus hearts

rests the Lord of Braja with Shri Radhika

What pious deed has transpired

for them to grace my home ?

Paramanandadas extends to them his best wishes
and celebrates over them again and again.

* * * * *

Hari graces those souls
who have a moment's contact with his 'bhaktas'.
No sins remain.

Faulty logic and lust disintegrate.
In these people's presence
souls remember to remember Hari.

The senseless gain wisdom;
the feeble turn pure,
the heart's enticer delights their hearts.
Maya and time can't touch
those who know Hari's 'bhaktas'.

Paramanandadas's heart is set on singing
the qualities of Hari's 'bhaktas'.

* * * * *

All the Vaishnavas enjoyed Paramanandadas's poem.
Ramdas questioned, "Among Krishna's parents, His friends,
cowlads and Gopis, who's love is supreme ?"

Ramdas knew that Paramanandadas was particularly
attached to Krishna's childhood play. He was testing the
poet's knowledge of Shri Mahaprabhu's teaching, that the love
of the Gopis was ultimate,

Paramanandadas then sang :

* * * * *

The Gopis are the banner of love.

Krishna is in their power,
His arms enfold them.

Suka, sages, and Vyasa canonize them
as did the saint, Uddhava.

The women of Braja, full of fortune,
are very pure in this world.

So what to be born a Brahman,
if one doesn't make Krishna's 'seva'.
Those who attend Paramananda
and stay before Hari
are the highest clan.

* * * * *

None on this earth can equal the Gopis.

They have offered their minds and bodies to Hari
and keep Krishna within their hearts.

They always wander with the heart's enticer.
In his mind he meditates upon the Gopis.

He constantly repeats the Gopis' names
and forgets all other knowledge.

Uddhava, Brahma, and others
strive for the dust of the Gopis' feet.

For the Gopis, who make butter in their homes,
the holder of the mountain dances all day.
Who is able to know the Gopis ?¹

Even Krishna Himself cannot fathom them.
What can my feeble mind know
of singing the glories of Paramananda.

* * * * *

Hearing the poem, all the Vaishnavas praised Paramanandadas, "You are truly blessed," and later returned to their homes. For many days Paramanandadas continued to sing before Shri Nathji.

PARAMANANDADAS SINGS SHRI GUSAINJI'S POEM

Once, Paramanandadas went to Gokul to have the sight of Shri Gusainji and Navanita Priyaji. The following morning, after Shri Gusainji bathed and entered the temple, he called Paramanandadas, who came and bowed to him. Shri Gusainji said, "Krishna loves all the Braja 'lilas' but they are without end. When one single 'lila' is infinite, who can sing all of his 'lilas' ? I have written one poem which depicts all the 'lilas' of Braja. You should sing it every morning before the Lord."

Paramanandadas then prayed to hear the poem. Because Shri Gusainji was an Acharya, he wrote in Sanskrit rather than in the vernacular, Braja Bhasa. Shri Gusainji then sang his poem :

* * * * *

"Mangal is auspicious.

1. The Gopis are considered to be the gurus of the Path of Grace. They have shown the Supreme Path of Love and are the great recipients of Krishna's grace. Their devotion is unpresidented. Bhaktas strive for Gopihood.

Auspicious are Nanda Yashoda
who sing splendid songs
lovingly tending Krishna upon their laps.

Shri Krishna is the essence of the Vedas.
The auspicious sound of His name
eradicated the pain of His distressed 'bhaktas'.

The feeling of the Braja women,
Krishna friends, the cows and deer
is an auspicious host of nectar
beyond description.

Auspicious is Krishna's light smile
as He looks and talks.

Playing, His nose points upward,
His pearl nose-ring quivers.
The sound of His soft finger tips
in harmony with the flute
enchant everything that emerges in Vrindavan.

Auspicious are all the Gopis,
their gait languid,
enraptured and bewildered
by the melody of the 'rasa' dance.

Eternal victory to you, Holder of the Mountain.
Harbor your own servants.

* * * * *

From that day this poem was sung daily, and still is sung every morning before Shri Nathji for it truly does contain all the Braja 'lilas'.

After Shri Gusainji sang the Sanskrit poem, Paramanandadas sang it and then composed a similar poem in Braja Bhasa.

* * * * *

To speak Krishna's name is auspicious.
 His face is auspicious.
 His hand is auspicious.
 He always cares for those auspicious people.
 His play is auspicious.
 To worship Him is auspicious.
 It is auspicious to sing munificent songs.
 It is auspicious to hear.
 The nectar of His stories is auspicious.
 The son of Vasudeva's body is auspicious.
 Gokul is auspicious.
 Maduvan is auspicious.
 It is auspicious to relish the Vrindavan Moon.
 For auspiciousness He held the Govardhana Hill,
 The garb of Yashoda's son is auspicious.
 Cows are auspicious.
 Sands of the earth are auspicious.
 His flute playing is auspicious.
 The Gopis' embraces are auspicious.
 Auspicious is the milky foam of the
 Yamuna river.
 The Lord's lotus-petal feet are auspicious.
 Auspicious is His fame in the world.
 Every day is auspicious.
 Auspicious is the sages' meditation.
 So thinks Paramanandadas.

* * * * *

Here a question arises : why did Paramanandadas sing "the son of Vasudeva" rather than the son of Nanda, for Vasudeva is Krishna's father in his Mathura 'lila' while Paramanandadas is singing only of the Lord's Braja 'lila', where Nanda and Yashoda were his parents? The answer is that the Kumarika Gopis lived with Yashoda and were like daughters to her, but looked upon Krishna as their husband. Calling Krishna the son of Nanda would make Him the Gopis' brother, contrary to their devotional sentiment.

After Paramanandadas sang that poem, while Shri Gusainji was making arti, Paramanandadas sang the following song:

* * * * *

My mind makes the mangal arti.
 The morning surplants the doubt of night.
 The cymbals chime an auspicious beat.
 Krishna's auspicious form awakes.
 The auspicious vina and mridang resound,
 as do the auspicious flute and sweet drum.
 Everyone gathers in a line and sings songs.
 The auspicious lights are lit.
 Auspiciousness generates in the
 auspicious 'rasa' dance.
 Auspicious is the intellect of Paramanandadas.

* * * * *

KRISHNA'S APPEARANCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

On the day of Krishna's appearance, Shri Gusainji bathed and adorned Shri Nathji and then proceeded to Shri Nathji's temple where he ornamented Shri Nathji, made an offering,

and then returned to Gokul. For those celebrations, Shri Gusainji took Paramanandadas to Gokul. There, while Shri Gusainji was bathing Navanita Priyaji, Paramanandadas sang :

* * * * *

Sakhi, join in the timely song-
Everyone rejoice.
Today Krishna is born.

Frolic in the merriment of celebration.

The courtyard washed,
the square bedecked,
Brahmans chant the Vedas.
With sandal paste, choba, and musk
fair Shyam is adorned.

Yashoda wells with euphoria.

She can't contain the joy within her.

The one who serves Krishna, Paramanandadas,
receives bounteous gifts.

* * * * *

When Shri Gusainji made Shri Nathji's 'tilak', Paramanandadas sang :

* * * * *

The child Yashoda has borne
gladdens my heart.

The five sounds reverberate.¹

1. The five sounds are the flute, horn, and three different percussion instruments.

Distinguished folk from every house arrive.
Braja's beautiful women
bring festive jugs on their heads.

The cowlads carry buckets of curd.

All the milk maids pronounce this benediction;
"Live for ten million years."

Paramanandadas's Krishna,
Lord of the world,
disguises as a cowlad.

* * * * *

In every house cowlads cheer,
and play the mridang, the flute,
the dhol and Damama and Bheri drums.

They loot, they seize, they devour sweets :
No one could possibly depict that scene.

No one can utter a word to those wild cowlads
as they surround the Braja maidens.

Flags, banners, streamers, festoons,
everywhere decked with decorations.

Glories, glories to Krishna
sings Paramanandadas.
The enemy of Kamsa¹ has appeared.

* * * * *

1. Just before Krishna was born, Kamsa, the king of Mathura, heard a celestial voice which warned him that he would die at the hands of Krishna. After Krishna's birth, the king tried in many ways to kill the divine child and thought of Krishna to the exclusion of everything else. Constantly absorbed in the image of Krishna as death personified when Krishna finally made short work of him, he achieved liberation.

Thus Paramanandadas sang many songs of celebration. After the midnight appearance festivities, everyone in the temple dressed up as cowlads, Gopis, and Krishna's parents and rocked Navanita Priyaji in his cradle. At that time, Paramanandadas sang :

* * * * *

Rapture blooms in the heart of Yashoda.

"Your son is the gem of your clan,
equal to the Lord Himself."

The elders bless him.

Gopis come from every town.

All get gifts, gather, depart,
hailing with bright praises.

The ten bring the rest contentment.

Paramanandadas's heart cherishes
Nanda's great lineage.

* * * * *

"The ten" refers to Shri Gusainji, his seven sons, Vallabhacharya and Shri Nathji, "the rest" refers to all other divine souls.

Then everyone started to throw yogurt and turmeric at each other. Paramanandadas, so transported with bliss, began to dance and forgot the order of ragas, singing the midday 'dhanashri' raga in the middle of the night :

* * * * *

Today, ecstasy abounds in Papa Nanda.

The milk maids dance, clammer, and celebrate.

Dressed in yellow and red blouses
and shining saris,
they paint their parts vermillion.

All the cowherds show up,
their buckets heaped with milk, curds,
and butter,
tooting flutes, fiddling,
singing mellisonant tunes.

The courtyard is thick with the mud
of crushed grain, turmeric, milk,
yogurt and red powder.

They joke with one another.
Love arrides their hearts; they hug.

Great sages descant the four Vedas.
The five sounds and the Dam dola drum ring.

Paramananda fills Gokul,
Reveling makes the heart light.

* * * * *

After singing that song, Paramanandadas fell to the ground unconscious. Shri Gusainji then raised the poet with his lotus hands. He sprinkled some water which he had blessed with a Vedic mantra. Only then did the swelling love settle down, allowing him to experience all the Lord's 'lilas'. Afterwards, Paramanandadas sang a song as Child Krishna was swung in His cradle.

* * * * *

Yashoda swings Krishna in a cradle.

She waves her hands,¹ rejoicing over Him.

For His very red lotus feet,
Brahma and other gods long and quest.

Yashoda contemplates her fortune.
She keeps gazing at His lotus face.

The master of the whole world,
rider of Garuda,²
is the son of Nanda,
the master of Supreme bliss.

* * * * *

Then, so absorbed in love, Paramanandadas again did not follow the normal order of ragas. After singing a morning raga, he played the evening melody of Kodharo.

* * * * *

"Queen,³ may well-being dwell in your home.

Listen, Yashoda, when you bathe your child
may not a hair fall from his head."

Some chant the auspicious Vedas.
Some sing, others laugh.

Looking and looking at His lotus face and eyes
the heart delights in the joy of love.

All the Gopis give their blessing,
some consumed by bliss.

-
1. This practice is done both to express joy and to ward off bad spirits.
 2. Vishnu, a form of Krishna, rides Garuda, the king of birds.
 3. Krishna's mother, Yashoda, is often called the queen of Braja.

Says Paramanandadas,
"Happy is the house of Nanda.
A son is born of world-wide celebrity."

* * * * *

Afterwards, Shri Gusainji took Paramanandadas to have the sight of Shri Nathji and there, amidst the festivities of throwing yogurt and turmeric, Paramanandadas again became engrossed in the bliss of 'lila'. Shri Gusainji made the midday offering and seeing Paramanandadas in his transcendental state of mind, commented, "Just as Kumbhandas is infused with the Lord's Kishor, youthful, 'lila', so Paramanandadas is focused upon Krishna's child 'lilas'."

Paramanandadas then bowed to Shri Gusainji and proceeded to the Surbi lake to his hut where he kept a vow of silence. Absorbed in the nectar of Krishna's appearance day regaling, he lay down, thinking that it was time to leave his body.

Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji, not seeing Paramanandadas in the temple asked where the poet had gone. The Vaishnavas replied, "Paramanandadas is in a trance, lying by the Surbi lake, not speaking to anyone."

Shri Gusainji took the Vaishnavas with him to that place. There he put his hand on Paramanandadas's head and said, "Paramanandadas, I know your heart. You have become weak."

The poet then prostrated himself before Shri Gusainji and sang :

* * * * *

Love the son of Nanda.
In wealth and disaster, he protects.

Through his grace one lives.

So generous, a wise wishing stone
for those who recall and please Him.

He knows the inner workings.
Keep me in the shade of his lotus feet.

The Vedas, Puranas, and Bhagavata
tell how he fulfills his 'bhakta's' hearts.

Says Paramanandadas,
"Riches great as Indra's
the Brahmin Sudama found."

* * * * *

In the poem Paramanandadas extols Shri Gusainji. As the poor Brahmin Sudama received great material wealth from Krishna, so Paramanandadas requests the gift of Supreme bliss from his guru, Shri Gusainji.

At that time, a Vaishnava asked Paramanandadas, "Reveal to me a way whereby the Lord will become pleased with me and offer me His grace."

Paramanandadas replied, "Listen carefully to this easy solution for it will grant you the fruit." He then sang about Shri Mahaprabhu, Shri Gusainji and his seven sons :

* * * * *

In the morning awake
and sing hymns to Vallabhacharya.

Shri Vallabh appeared to give the gift of 'bhakti'.

A treasure is the form of the great Lord Vitthalnathji.
Shri Girdharji, the rising son.

"What can be said of
Shri Govinda's concentrated bliss ?

Fair Shri Bala Krishnaji plays like a child.

Shri Gokulnathji comes to speak about the path.
Bashful is Cupid when he sees Raghunathji.

Shri Yadunathji is the whole Lord.

Shri Ghanshyamji grants wishes
and contemplates scripture.

Pandu Rang Vitthalesh chants the Vedas.

Says Paramanandadas,

"The gods,
as they watch this 'lila' from their celestial cars,
are blown away."

* * * * *

Hearing that, Shri Gusainji asked Paramanandadas,
"Where is your mind now?" Paramanandadas sang :

* * * * *

Radha sits fixing her bindi.¹

The deer-eyed one charged with the love god
broods upon Krishna's form.

Holding a mirror she arranges
her necklace and jewelry.

The day passes like an eon.

Within her heart lives love for the beautiful Shyam.

She recollects dallying with Hari.

The day is done,
Night engulfs Braja.

She encounters the Holder of the Mountain.

1. The sacred dot women wear on the forehead.

Union with the Master of Supreme bliss
delights the Braja lady.

* * * * *

Meditating upon the divine couple, Paramanandadas left his body and entered into the Lord's eternal 'lila'. Shri Gusainji returned to Shri Nathji's temple and there, after completing the afternoon 'seva', returned to his home. The Vaishnavas cremated Paramanandadas and went before Shri Gusainji to eulogize him. Shri Gusainji revealed to those Vaishnavas, "In the Path of Grace, Paramanandadas and Surdas are the two oceans. Within their hearts is the unfathomable ambrosia of the Lord's 'lila'."

KUMBHANADAS

Kumbhanadas's form in the 'lila' during the day is Krishna's friend, Arjuna, and at night he is the Gopi Vishaka. On the Govardhana Hill are eight doors for each of the eight poets to enter Krishna's 'lila'. Kumbhanadas's door is near Anyor at Yamunavata where the poet was born.¹ The town is so named because the Yamuna river flowed there, by the Govardhana Hill in Krishna's day.

Within the close vicinity of his town are numerous places where Krishna played during His incarnation on earth. Krishna made 'rasa lila' at the Chandra lake and subsequently disappeared there when the Gopis haughtily asserted that they were the best women on earth. The Gopis searched for Krishna all around the Govardhana Hill in the locale of Kumbhanadas's home at Govinda lake, Apsara lake, and Rudra lake asking all the vines and trees where their beloved had gone. Meanwhile, Krishna was dallying with Radha who, at Rudra lake, likewise became filled with pride and demanded that she not walk but rather ride on Krishna's shoulders. When Krishna disappeared from her too, she began to wail, "Where are you? Where are you?" The lake is thus called Rudra, which means 'to cry'. A short time later, the other Gopis found the forlorn Radha and all together

1. Kumbhanadas and his son were the only Ashta Chhap poets native to the Govardhana Hill area.

they wandered about the Govardhana Hill singing and crying, hoping their beloved Lord would reappear. When they reached the Yamuna river, Krishna suddenly manifested Himself and delighted the Braja maidens by dancing the 'rasa lila' with them.

The present day Vrindavan is the sight of Krishna's spring 'rasa' but at Chandra lake, Krishna performed the dazzling autumn 'rasa lila' which is described in the Bhagavata.¹

KUMBHANADAS MEETS MAHAPRABHU

Kumbhanadas tended the fields of his forefathers at Yamuna Vatah. From his childhood, he was not interested in household life. He always spoke the truth and stayed away from sinful activities. When Kumbhanadas was a young man, he married a woman who, though she was not connected to Krishna's 'lila', was liberated because of her contact with Kumbhanadas.

Once, when Shri Mahaprabhu was pilgrimaging in the south of India at Jarakund, Shri Krishna spoke to him, "I have appeared at the Govardhana Hill. Come, establish my worship for the world to see."

Shri Mahaprabhu travelled to Braja with five of his closest disciples. Arriving at the Govardhana Hill, he began to serve Shri Nathji and many of the local people became his followers. When Kumbhanadas heard that a great soul had come to the area, he told his wife, "Let's go to Anyor and become Shri Mahaprabhu's disciples."

His wife considered to herself, "I don't have any offspring. This saint will bless me so that I will bear children."

1. Living amidst such holy grounds was obviously a great inspiration to the 'bhakta'-poet.

She accompanied her husband to see Shri Mahaprabhu. There, Kumbhanadas bowed and prayed, "For so long I have wandered. Now, won't you give me your grace?"

Because Kumbhanadas was a divine soul, he knew Shri Mahaprabhu's spiritual form. After the guru initiated the couple, Kumbhanadas's wife entreated, "You are a great soul; give me a blessing so that I will have children."

Shri Mahaprabhu assured her, "Don't worry, you will have seven."

Later, Kumbhanadas inquired of his wife, "Why did you request only that? You would have received God if you had asked for Him."

She bluntly replied, "You ask for what you want, I request what I desire."

Kumbhanadas was silent.

Shri Mahaprabhu built for Shri Nathji a small hut on top of the Govardhana Hill and gave the worship to Ramdas. Sadu Pande and other Braja people provided the foodstuffs. Shri Mahaprabhu told the local people, among whom was Kumbhanadas, "Shri Nathji is our all and everything. Serve Him well. Take 'prashad' only after having His sight."

Because Kumbhanadas had a good voice, Shri Mahaprabhu gave him the service of singing everyday for Shri Nathji. One morning, after Shri Mahaprabhu had awakened Shri Nathji, he asked Kumbhanadas to sing something about the Lord's 'lila'. Kumbhanadas sang to Shri Nathji :

* * * * *

In the evening you said you would be true.

O son of Nanda, you spent the night elsewhere
and now come here just before sunrise.

In your haste, you wear her blue shawl
and forget your yellow cloths.

Says Kumbhanadas, "Holder of the Mountain,
you really stick to your word."¹

* * * * *

Shri Mahaprabhu asked Kumbhanadas, "Have you experienced the nectar of Krishna's amorous bower 'lila'?"

He replied, "All through your grace."

Shri Mahaprabhu, elated, said, "It is your great fortune that the Lord has blessed you with knowledge of His 'lila'. You will always remain immersed in bliss."

Kumbhanadas exclaimed, "This is my favorite mood. Shower your grace and allow me to feel it."

The poet did not sing of Krishna's appearance or childhood plays. All of his poems dealt with the intimate pastimes of Radha and Krishna.

In time, Shri Mahaprabhu left Braja and continued on his pilgrimage around India to uplift divine souls.

SHRI NATHJI GOES TO TOND GHANO

Everyday Kumbhanadas walked from Yamuna Vatah to Shri Nathji's temple and sang for his Lord. Shri Nathji revealed Himself to the poet and would often play and talk with Him.

Once, the Moguls entered the Braja area, looting and killing. When they were ten miles from the Govardhana Hill, Sadu Pande, his brother, Manika, Chanda, Ramdas and Kumbhanadas considered, "These Moguls hate our faith. What should we do?"

1. This type of poem, normally sung in the morning is called 'khandita' which means 'broken'. The theme of these poems is always that Krishna has broken a promise to keep a night engagement, only to appear in the morning full of love signs which reveals his association with another Gopi. Kumbhanadas, unlike Paramanandadas and Sur, from the beginning sang the praises of Krishna's intimate 'lilas'.

They decided to ask Shri Nathji, who told them, "I want to go to the berry thicket at Tond Ghano."

They questioned, "In what vehicle shall we take you?"

Shri Nathji replied, "Sadu Pande has a buffalo. I'll ride on his back. Sadu Pande brought his buffalo and Shri Nathji was placed upon it."

That buffalo was a divine soul and in its previous life was a gardener for Radha's father. Once, because she did not give Shri Radha proper respect, she was cursed to appear upon the earth as a buffalo. Still, she was assured that Krishna would bless her and eventually re-establish her position in the Lord's 'lila'.¹

Ramdas and Sadu Pande held Shri Nathji mounted on the buffalo as they proceeded to Tond Ghano, while Kumbhanadas and Manika Chanda with difficulty cleared the thorny path, tearing their clothes in the process. In the middle of the Tond Ghano there is a bower and a river. Shri Nathji directed Kumbhanadas and Manika Chanda where to go. They arrived at a hut by the edge of a small lake with an elevated circular dance area² nearby. There, Ramdas and Kumbhanadas asked Shri Nathji, "Where do you want to stay?"

Shri Nathji replied, "Inside the hut."

They lowered Shri Nathji from the buffalo and arranged His throne as He requested. Shri Nathji told Ramdas, "Offer me some food, and then go off while I eat."

1. Some people question the authenticity of this and other parts of the 'varta' which say that a 'bhakta' has appeared upon the earth because of a curse given in the 'lila'. Both sides should be understood. The concept that this buffalo and other divine souls were cursed to fall from the 'lila' can be questioned, because 'lila' realm is eternal, free from 'karma' and beyond the effect of any such indictment. The other position says that the curse is part of the 'lila' and should not be considered as their downfall, but rather a positive part of Krishna's divine drama.
2. This lake still exists. A small temple has also been constructed there in honor of Shri Nathji's visit.

Ramdas and Kumbhanadas thought, "Shri Nathji must have come here to fulfil the wishes of some Gopis."

When Ramdas went to offer Shri Nathji some of the food he had brought, Shri Nathji told him, "Offer everything."

Ramdas offered two kilos of 'helvah'¹ and implored of Shri Nathji, "If I give you everything now and we stay here for a while, what shall I offer you later?"

Shri Nathji consoled him, "We will not remain here long."

The four Vaishnavas left Shri Nathji and went to sit among some trees.

Shri Nathji's consort, Shri Svaminiji arrived there and offered Shri Nathji some delicacies she had made. She had had some difficulty in preparing these foodstuffs. Shri Nathji, to raise her spirits, called to Kumbhanadas to sing a poem while they partook of the offerings. Kumbhanadas considered, "The Lord wants to hear something amusing." He and the other Vaishnavas were hungry and full of thorns, so Kumbhanadas sang :

* * * * *

I like this berry thicket.

Stuck with thorns and burrs
our clothes are torn.

A lion scared of a jackal²
that's something new.

1. A soft sweet made from toasted flour, ghee and sugar water.

2. Here Kumbhanadas is teasing Krishna that "You the Supreme Lord are afraid of some Moguls. That is like saying a lion is scared of a jackal. Simply unheard of!" When the situation worsened, some fifty years after this incident, Shri Nathji was moved to Nathdwara, Rajasthan where He resides to this day. The Moguls, in fact, did destroy most of the temples in the area and caused most of the saints living there to flee to the neighboring state of Rajasthan, where they were offered shelter from the Hindu kings.

Says Kumbhanadas,
"You are the Holder of the Mountain
and who are these Moguls,
the brood of a lowborn widow."

* * * * *

Then Kumbhanadas sang :

* * * * *

(One messenger appeals to Svaminiji)
Speak to the captivating Shyam.
He sits in a bunch of lotuses.

The vines blossom,
black bees hum,
cuckoos chant their call.

Hearing the messenger's honey words
her heart and body thrill.
Says Kumbhanadas, the lady of Braja
meets the prince of enjoyers,
Giridhar.¹

* * * * *

These poems delighted Shri Nathji. Shri Svaminiji then asked her Lord, "By what means have You come here today?"

Shri Nathji replied, "I came on the back of Sadu Pande's water buffalo."

Shri Svaminiji, looking at the beast, exclaimed, "That buffalo was my gardener, but because she insulted me, she has

1. This type of poem is called Man, wherein Krishna's consort, filled with annoyance in love, refuses to meet Krishna until she is consoled by a female messenger Krishna sends to plead His case.

become this animal. Now that she has served You well, she is redeemed."

The divine couple savored many love sports before Shri Nathji's consort returned home.

One could question, "How could Shri Svaminiji go to a place so filled with thorns?" Actually it was filled with beautiful trees and flowers endowed with the Lord's own bliss. Only worldly people perceive the thorns which deter them from approaching such places where Shri Krishna plays with His devoted ones. When the four Vaishnavas were taking Shri Nathji on the back of the buffalo, they passed many people who saw the buffalo, but not Shri Nathji. The Lord only gives His sight to His 'bhaktas'.

Shri Nathji then called the four Vaishnavas and asked them if the Moguls had retreated. Sadu Pande went to scout outside the thicket and returned, reporting that the invaders had withdrawn. Shri Nathji requested, "Please take me back to my temple on top of the Govardhana Hill."

They placed Shri Nathji on the water buffalo and travelled home. When they reached the temple, the beast left its body and returned to the 'lila'.

All the local people were excited to have Shri Nathji's sight again and said, "Through His power, this crisis has been dispelled in a mere second."

Kumbhanadas sang as Shri Nathji rode up the hill :

* * * * *

Liquidator of Indra's rain

and razor of his pride.¹

He obliterates the pain of the Braja people,
glories to his most dazzling yellow cloth.
His delicate body,
the hue of a water-laden cloud.

Holding his flute to his lips
he plays a song of soft and sharp notes,
naturally annexing the minds of the
Braja maidens.

Glories to the tulsi forest,
a land of recreation.
The whole world reveres his lotus feet.

By the bank of the Yamuna river
the son of Nanda plays.
Says Kumbhanadas,
"I bow and take your shelter."

* * * * *

Then he sang :

* * * * *

By the banks of the Yamuna river
the 'rasa' circle forms.

-
1. Indra, the god of rain, was enraged when he saw that Krishna made the people of Braja worship the Govardhana Hill, which is Krishna's own form, rather than himself. In revenge, he sent destructive rains to fall upon the area. Krishna protected His friends and kin by holding the hill above His head, which acted like an umbrella. and everyone remained dry. Observing this amazing feat, Indra, his pride obliterated, knew Krishna to be God and sought His forgiveness. Hence, we have Krishna's name, Govardhandhar or Giridhar, Holder of the Mountain.

The flute held to his lips
emanates melodious tones.

Groups of women dance
in diverse expression.
Seeing them abashed the god of lust,
his conceit abandoned.
Krishna's garb is a yellow silk cloth.

His moon-like toenails
on his lucky feet
dispel the world's darkness.
Exquisite are his earrings.

His eyebrows arch like a bow,
his eyes quiver like Cupid's arrows
about to fire.

His anklets jingle,
his waist bells jangle.
His voice resounds deeply
like a thundering cloud.

Declares Kumbhanadas, "From head to toe,
the Holder of the Mountain
is spectacular.

* * * * *

Kumbhanadas sang many such poems before Lord
Krishna and pleased Him. Kumbhanadas became famous
throughout the land.

AKBAR CALLS KUMBHANADAS

People everywhere began to sing Kumbhanadas's poetry.
A certain musician learned one of Kumbhanadas's songs and
sang it before Emperor Akbar at his place, Fatehpur Sikri.

* * * * *

Look at Krishna coming.
He steps with the gait of Airavata¹
and makes the heart shy.
Unrivalled is his lilting rhythm.

The cloth at Shyam's waist,
the gorgeous garland on his handsome chest
steal the heart.

His brow like a bow,
the glances of his wide eyes
armed with Cupid's arrows.
Dust embellishes his curly locks.
A saffron tilak marks his forehead.

Says Kumbhanadas,
"That attractive young boy,
the Holder of the Mountain,
captivated the world with his laugh."

* * * * *

The delighted emperor exclaimed, "Is there any person
who has had such a sight of the Supreme Lord?"

The musician replied, "That saint who has composed
this poem lives near here."

Akbar questioned, "Who is he?"

"His name is Kumbhanadas. He lives in Yamuna Vatah
by the Govardhana Hill."

The emperor ordered, "Call him here. I wish to meet
him."

1. Indra's celestial elephant,

He sent his men with many types of vehicles to fetch Kumbhanadas. When Akbar's men arrived at the Govardhana Hill, Kumbhanadas was not in Yamuna Vatah, but in his fields by the Chandra lake. After finding out about Kumbhanadas's whereabouts, one man escorted them to the Vaishnava poet. The emperor's men requested, "Akbar has called you."

Kumbhanadas replied, "I am a poor resident of Braja and am no one's servant but the Lord's. What do I have to do with the emperor that I should go there?"

Akbar's men pleaded, "We don't know anything except that the emperor has told us to bring you. These vehicles are all for you. If you don't accompany us, the emperor will execute us, so please come."

Kumbhanadas considered, "In this case, it is necessary for me to go and suffer the consequences."

Akbar's men suggested to him, "Sit upon this horse or upon that palanquin."

Kumbhanadas explained, "I never ride on any vehicle. Don't say anything to me. I will proceed on foot."

Although they implored him repeatedly, Kumbhanadas walked to the emperor's place. When they arrived, Akbar called them into his court. Kumbhanadas, dressed only in a ripped shirt, soiled clothes and turban, and ragged shoes went before the emperor who commanded, "Sit."

The palace was sweetly scented, inlaid with pearls and jewels, but Kumbhanadas's heart was pained. He thought that he had arrived in hell, thinking, "My Braja is better than this, for there Krishna sports."

The emperor said, "You have written many poems about the Lord, I would like to hear some."

Kumbhanadas was insulted by the emperor's words and thought, "I must sing, but in front of this Muslim I cannot

sing the poems of Krishna. So what shall I sing? Shri Nathji loves to hear my songs, but this man has called me, separating me from my Beloved Lord. Therefore, I should sing something to insult him. What can he do to me?"

Then he remembered the saying that not a hair can fall from the head of one Krishna has accepted, even if the whole world is his enemy; then composed a new poem and sang it for Akbar.

* * * * *

What interest does a 'bhakta' have in Sikri?
Coming here, my shoes wore out
and I forgot Hari's name.
I must pay homage to a face
whose sight pains me.

Says Kumbhanadas,
"Without Krishna.
this whole place is false."

* * * * *

Hearing Kumbhanadas's song, Akbar was filled with anger, but then reflected, "If he were greedy, he would have praised me, but he is only interested in God," and said to Kumbhanadas, "I will give you whatever you desire."

Kumbhanadas immediately replied, "Never call me again."

On his way back home, Kumbhanadas began experiencing the divine separation from Shri Nathji and sang the following poem:

* * * * *

When will I see and fill my eyes with him?

Every limb of superb Shyam's charming form
endows felicity.
Every day he plays in Vrindavan
taking along his band of cowlads.

Laughing merrily, they guzzle milk foam,
each in his own style.

Bemoans Kumbhanadas,
how many days have passed
since those ecstatic nights ?

Now, day and night,
without the Holder of the Mountain,
my heart is discontent.

* * * * *

When Kumbhanadas arrived at Shri Nathji's temple, the
short amount of time which had intervened seemed to him
like an age. Beholding Krishna's face, his sorrow dispelled
and he broke out in song :

* * * * *

My eyes filled
with the son of Nanda.
From that day, I've forgotten
my husband, family, everything.
Now, without his sight,
I am out of sorts, completely beat.

Recalling his dark form
my eyes stream with tears.
Abounding in his charm,
he knows no bound.
How to find that Krishna !

Now Kumbhanadas meets
the Holder of the Mountain,
and takes him again to his breast.

* * * * *

This crush on Krishna
is tough on my heart.
Listen, my frind.

For him I've purged
all shame from this body.
My clan sneers at me,
people ridicule me,
From heaven I'm banned.

Why survive without his salutary sight ?
I'm glued to that nectar,
not for a moment can I quit.

I'm addicted
like the deer to the vina.¹

Avers Kumbhanadas,
"The Holder of the Mountain
knows the core of my love."

* * * * *

Shri Nathji enjoyed Kumbhanadas's poetry and praised
him, "Kumbhanadas, you are a blessed soul. As you can't
live a moment without Me, so without you, everything seems
bland."

Their love was truly mutual.

1. The deer is famed for its love of vina music which the hunter employs
to draw it into his trap.

RAJA MANSINGH VISITS THE TEMPLES

Once, the emperor's close associate, Raja Mansingh, after conquering many lands, came to Agra to meet with Akbar. Receiving the emperor's permission, Raja Mansingh proceeded homewards and stopped at Mathura where he bathed in the Yamuna river. Meeting with the local Brahmins, he told them he wanted to have the sight of the famous Keshoraya's temple. Knowing that Raja Mansingh was going to visit the temple, the priest adorned the Krishna deity with heavily laced gold and silver cloth, even though it was the middle of the hot season. After visiting that temple, Raja Mansingh proceeded to Vrindavan where the temple priests, interested in impressing Raja Mansingh, adorned their Krishna deities with cumbersome garments and jewels. Seeing the main temples there, Raja Mansingh returned to his tent thinking, "They adorned their deities just to impress me."

That afternoon, he proceeded to the Govardhana Hill where he climbed up to Shri Nathji's temple, his bare feet scorched by the hot rocks. When he arrived at the temple, the doors had just opened. Beholding Shri Nathji, Raja Mansingh's eyes were refreshed. All around the temple, rose water was sprinkled. Shri Nathji was smeared with sandal paste, the air was scented and circulated by fans. Seeing Shri Nathji adorned with a light white cotton cloth, a few pearl necklaces and other light pearl jewelry, Raja Mansingh was cooled to the core and thought, "Here the Lord has truly appeared and happily resides. It is my great fortune to have had this sight."

While Raja Mansingh was viewing the temple, Kumbhanadas sang some poems before Shri Nathji :

* * * * *

My eyes don't even blink
when I see that form.
Beholding Krishna

my eyes and herat
stick to his every part.
How to describe.
I can't utter a word.

The one who begs for curds
has taken off with my mind.
Sings Kumbhanadas,
"When Krishna encounters the Gopis
he tells them beautiful things."

* * * * *

Friend, he has become the door guards to these eyes.
Friend, how to stop those Khanjan¹ eyes ?
When he comes down the path,
I can't close my lids.

Friend, I am flooded with love
and spy day and night
upon his every pleasure.

Friend, for Kumbhanadas's Lord,
Govardhandhar,
these eyes are searching.

* * * * *

And finally he sang :

* * * * *

Krishna came and stole my heart.
I was sitting contented at home
when I saw his face and
forgot all about my veil.

1. Khanjan birds are known for their lovely eyes.

The loving son of Nanda
is a mansion of form.
Meeting his eyes
I can't contain myself.

Every limb of Krishna
is saturated with love's ambrosia.

* * * * *

When the temple closed, Raja Mansingh returned to his tent. Later that evening, as the lights were waved around Shri Nathji (arti), Kumbhanadas sang :

* * * * *

Upon Krishna's face
the lights are waved.

With a concentrated mind
everything is beautifully arranged.
The wicks are heavy with ghee and camphor.

In great harmony sound the conch, the 'bheri'
and 'mridang' drums
with cymbals, bells and chimes.
The tongue delights in the fine taste
of singing the dark Lord's glories.

With great enthusiasm the whisk is waved
over Krishna's head.

His body, splendid
like the rising of a billion suns,
dissolves the darkness of the world.

Says Kumbhanadas, "My eyes are filled
with the beloved form of Giridhar."

* * * * *

After singing those songs, Kumbhanadas returned to Yamunavata while Raja Mansingh returned to his tent where he began conversing with his men about Shri Nathji. He questioned, "Who was the one who sang songs in praise of Lord Vishnu tonight?"

One Braja Vasi explained, "His name is Kumbhanadas. He eats only the grains he grows. You must have heard that Emperor Akbar called him to his court, but that Kumbhanadas took nothing from him. He is indeed a great saint."

Raja Mansingh, anxious to meet the poet, immediately said, "Tomorrow I will go to meet Kumbhanadas."

The following morning Raja Mansingh began the encircling of the Govardhana Hill. When he reached the Chandra lake, Kumbhanadas had already bathed and gone to tend his fields, where Shri Nathji appeared to him. Kumbhanadas called to the divine child, "Baba, come here."

Shri Nathji sat in Kumbhanadas's lap and affectionately said, "I have come here to tell you something," when all of a sudden Raja Mansingh arrived causing Shri Nathji to run off and hide in some nearby trees.

Raja Mansingh bowed to Kumbhanadas and sat next to the poet, but Kumbhanadas's gaze was fixed on the spot where his beloved Krishna was concealed and did not pay any attention to Mansingh.

Meanwhile, one Braja Vasi mentioned to Kumbhanadas's niece, who was about to bring Kumbhanadas his 'rotis' and sweet porridge, "Quickly go to your uncle. A king has come to meet him. Take whatever he offers, for, you know, Kumbhanadas will not even touch him."

Seeing her uncle transfixed upon the tree where Krishna had hidden she called out, Uncle Kumbhanadas, a king is sitting next to you. Why don't you greet him?"

Kumbhanadas replied, "What can I do if someone has come and sat next to me. He (Shri Nathji) was about to tell

me something and suddenly ran away. Now I don't know if He will ever reveal to me what was in His mind."

Shri Nathji then signaled to Kumbhanadas, "I am very pleased with you. Don't worry, I will tell you what I'm thinking."

Only then was Kumbhanadas consoled, though no one else was able to hear or see Shri Nathji talking with Kumbhanadas.

Kumbhanadas called to his niece, "Bring me my seat and mirror, I wish to make my 'tilak'."

She exclaimed, "Uncle Kumbhanadas, the buffalo ate your seat of grass and drank the bowl of water which you use as your mirror."

She then gathered some more grass, filled his bowl again with water, and brought these things to her uncle. Taking his seat, Kumbhanadas looked into the water and made his 'tilak'. Raja Mansingh watched and thought, "Kumbhanadas is indeed poor. He doesn't even have a seat or a mirror. Up to now I have heard about his renunciation, but now I have seen it for myself." He then called for a gold mirror studded with costly jewels and presented it to Kumbhanadas. "Take this mirror to make your 'tilak'."

"O friend," Kumbhanadas exclaimed, "Where should I put such a mirror? Our house is thatched and made of mud; and someone trying to steal this costly ornament might kill us. I don't want such a thing."

The king thought, "True, what will he do with an expensive object. Nor is he the type of man who would go and sell it. Therefore, I will give him some money."

When he placed a bag of a thousand gold coins in front of Kumbhanadas the poet replied, "I don't need your money nor anything else. I eat the grains I grow in my fields."

When the king tried to give him the town of Yamunavata Kumbhanadas flatly refused explaining, "I am not a Brahman.

If you want to offer gifts, find some Brahmans."

In a last effort the king requested, "Tell me, who is your grocer? I will arrange for all your foodstuffs."

"My grocer and I have the same nature," replied Kumbhanadas.

"Tell me where he lives," the king inquired.

Kumbhanadas, pointing to two distant trees explained, "These two trees are my grocers. In the hot season the Karila tree gives me fruit and Tanti berries while during the winter this Modi Bera tree supplies me with plentiful sweet berries."

Raja Mansingh lauded the poet. "You are blessed. The trees are your grocers. I have seen great renunciates in my life but they were not householders like you. There is not another equal to you upon the face of the earth."

Bowing to Kumbhanadas, the king pleaded, "Tell me what to do."

Kumbhanadas asked him if he would really do as he was told. When the king promised, Kumbhanadas rebuffed him, "Never come to me again."

As Raja Mansingh was leaving he again extolled the poet, "In my travels all around this world I have seen many false devotees, but you are the Lord's true 'bhakta'."

After Raja Mansingh left, Kumbhanadas's niece approached her uncle, "We don't have a single possession. Why didn't you accept what the king offered you?"

Kumbhanadas exclaimed, "Sit down you stupid girl. If Shri Nathji were to hear what you said, He would be enraged and assert, 'Kumbhanadas's niece is a very greedy girl'!"

His niece, taken aback, replied, "I really don't desire anything. I just said that in jest."

Kumbhanadas scolded, "One should never even joke about such things."

Shri Nathji suddenly appeared to Kumbhanadas, sat on the poet's lap, and said, "From the moment that I left you why did you become so anxious?"

Kumbhanadas replied to Him in verse :

* * * * *

Krishna, you are the great love of my heart.
From these eyes, you should never leave.
As long as I live, let me behold you.
I bow down to your feet again and again.
Don't let my mind wander elsewhere.

Beloved, this body is mirthful and contented
when I embrace you.
Amorous son of Nanda,
surrounded by those who relish the supreme mood,
extinguish all my misery.

My enticing Shyam, don't hesitate to come,
go and remain in my home.

Says Kumbhanadas,
You are the Holder of the Mountain,
destroyer of enemies.
Why were you afraid of him?

* * * * *

Hearing Kumbhanadas's song, Shri Nathji put His arms around the poet's neck and said, "I came here to tell you something."

Kumbhanadas, intrigued, replied, "You were about to tell me before, but that king came and You ran away. From that moment I have been wondering what You wanted to say."

Shri Nathji explained, "Kumbhanadas ! Today there is a contest between all of My friends to see who can prepare the most delectable meal. I came here to ask you if you had any special wish to prepare an offering for Me ?"

Kumbhanadas questioned, "Do You have any special wish ?"

Shri Nathji replied, "Barley porridge, milk, yogurt, 'rotis' made with wheat and chick pea flour and Tanti berry pickles."

Kumbhanadas affirmed, "That will all be predated."

Excitedly Shri Nathji said, "Quickly bring all the offerings here."

After Kumbhanadas told his niece to bring everything, she mentioned, "There is some milk, but I was going to make yogurt with it."

"Don't make yogurt," Kumbhanadas interjected, "Bring me the entire pot of milk and everything else I need."

When it arrived, Kumbhanadas prepared the Lord's offerings and, after placing them before Shri Nathji, he sang :

* * * * *

Braja's supreme fruit are these Tanti berries.
From them you can make vegetables and pickles
or eat them with chickpea, wheat 'rotis'.

The elder daughter of a herdman
goes out with a basket
and picks them.

Says Kumbhanadas, on the way she is embraced
by the young Krishna.

* * * * *

From every house a lunch is brought.

Sour, sweet and delicious,
many different types of preparations.

On the Yamuna banks,
in the forest haven's thick shade
the group of friends forms.

The Gopis and cowherds gather and lunch
and praise whatever they eat.
Young Krishna and his older brother serve,
using both their exquisite hands.

Savoring everything himself, Krishna
puts some in the mouth of his friends,
stealing away the Gopis' hearts.

Tanti berries, vegetables, pickles, 'rotis', yogurt and
delicious wheat gruel.

Kumbhanadas's Holder of the Mountain,
caught up in the different tastes,
dances all around.

* * * * *

Emmersed in great pleasure, Kumbhanadas sang those
songs and later distributed the 'prasada' to the Lord's friends,
before taking some himself. For the entire day he remained
unaware of anything other than the supreme joy of that 'lila'.
That afternoon, when he realized that he had not had Shri
Govardhananathji's sight atop the Govardhana Hill, his heart
became filled with divine longing. He excitedly ran to the
temple thinking, "When will I have Shri Nathji's sight?"

Arriving there, the evening 'darshan' had just opened and
beholding his beloved Lord, Kumbhanadas sang :

* * * * *

Our eyes met and became four.
Standing there, I was plundered.
I forgot to arrange the shawl covering my breast.

Unassuming, I had come to Nanda's house
and there beheld the fair Shyam.

Upon him my gaze transfixed,
my feet immobilized.
Love emerged for the love god's enticer
the household forgotten.

Mountain Holder,
greedy for love's nectar,
bravo, you have truly upheld
the Vedic code of conduct.¹

Upon the son of Nanda
I make 'bali heri'.²
As I regard Shyam's gentle form
I discover bliss.

Lord of the world,
husband of the goddess of wealth,
with my tongue I sing your pure impassioned
glories.

To the Holder of the Mountain
Kumbhanadas offers his body, mind, everything.

* * * * *

1. Here the poet jestingly affirms that Krishna's conduct transcends the Vedic code.
2. The right hand is waved clockwise, the left counterclockwise around the loved one while wishing him eternal well-being.

* * * * *

Every moment his splendor increases.

O friend, when I see that fresh form
my gaze cannot stay elsewhere.
What can I say, it is boundless,
though my mind bounds at great length.

Kumbhanadas's Lord Krishna
is elegance at its zenith.
I place him upon my head.

* * * * *

THE SAINTS OF VRINDAVAN MEET KUMBHANADAS

Once, Shri Hita Harivamsh, Shri Haridas¹, and some other Vaishnava saints from the neighboring town of Vrindavan came to meet Kumbhanadas for they knew him to have had Krishna's divine sight. Upon meeting the poet they asked, "We have heard many of your poems about Radha Krishna, but we have never heard any of your work which solely describes Shri Svaminiji (Shri Radha). Please sing for us now one poem about Shri Svaminiji. Kumbhanadas sang for them :

* * * * *

Radha, you are the pinnacle
of all great fortune.
A billion moons cannot compare to
your face.

My heart does not even consider
that the eyes of a billion khanjan birds and deer
could compete with your own.

1. Shri Hita Harivamsh and Shri Haridas were two great poet 'bhaktas' who created their own following in Vrindavan around the same time as Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya.

A billion plantain trees equated with your thighs,
the waists of a billion lions matched to yours
reject as unfair comparisons.

The gait of a billion elephants next to yours,
a billion jugs compared with your breasts
are all likeness discarded.

A billion parrot noses cannot touch your nose.
Nor can a billion jessine flowers rival your teeth.
A billion ripe bimba fruits
are tossed aside compared to your lips.

A billion snakes matched to your pigtail,
a billion pigeon necks to yours,
all cast off as unjust metaphors.

A billion lotuses are still not a proper simile
for your hands,
nor can I find in this world
any other suitable analogy.

Describes Kumbhanadas, Svaminiji
is amazingly formed from head to toe.
How long can I keep comparing ?
The Holder of the Mountain says,
"My pleasure is beholding her every second."¹

* * * * *

1. Within this poem, Kumbhanadas has exhausted all the traditional similes for the different parts of the body used in classical India literature. Moon for the face, 'khanjan' bird and deer eyes for the eyes, etcn, are all considered the epitome of beauty but none can equal Krishna's consort, Shri Svaminiji, for her splendor is divine. Another point of interest, many Vaishnavas who are not conversant with the Path of Grace, think that Mahaprabhu and his followers adorn only the infant Krishna. Kumbhanadas has proved otherwise in this and other poems. In fact, Mahaprabhu has taught that the Gopis are the gurus in the Path of grace, for their devotion to Krishna was unsurpassed.

Hearing Kumbhanadas's song, the Vrindavan saints exclaimed, "We have composed many poems about Shri Svaminiji in which her beauty had been compared to the moon and other things, but you have related her face to a billion moons ! Kumbhanadas, no one in this world has made analogies to Radha's beauty in this amazing way."

SHRI GUSAINJI ASKS KUMBHANADAS TO ACCOMPANY HIM TO GUJARAT

Once, Shri Gusainji, with the intention of travelling to Dwarka to uplift many divine souls living there, left Gokul and proceeded to the Govardhana Hill. There he made Shri Nathji's ornamentation and other 'seva'. When the temple was closed for the day, Shri Gusainji took his meals and sat in his room where all the Vaishnavas came to pay their respects to him. In the course of conversation, the Vaishnavas began to tell Shri Gusainji about Kumbhanadas's poverty, explaining, "He must support his seven sons, their wives, seven daughters, a niece and his wife on what his limited fields and tanti trees yield. In addition to this, he extends his hospitality to any Vaishnava that happens to pass by there."

Later that day, when Kumbhanadas arrived, Shri Gusainji greeted him, "Kumbhanadas, come and sit down here."

After all the other people left, Shri Gusainji told Kumbhanadas, "I am on my way to Dwarka. I must go because many Vaishnavas have written me earnest requests to visit them. If you accompany me, my time will pass quickly, and I will not suffer the separation from enlightened 'bhaktas'. I have also heard that you have financial difficulties. This trip will solve all those problems for you."

Shri Gusainji then left to complete Shri Nathji's afternoon 'seva'. That evening Shri Gusainji advised Kumbhanadas, "Return home now. Tomorrow after lunch we will start on our way."

The following day, Shri Gusainji completed the Lord's morning worship, and then, accompanied by a number of Vaishnavas, started out for Gujarat. They halted for the night at the far end of the Govardhana Hill at the Apsara lake, intending to continue on their journey the following morning. Arriving there Kumbhanadas reflected, "What can I do ? No one can know the distress I feel at being separated from Shri Nathji."

When it became time for Shri Nathji's afternoon 'seva' to commence, Kumbhanadas's mood of separation overwhelmed his heart, his eyes welled with tears, the hairs on his body all stood up on end in ecstatic bliss. Leaning against a tree just outside of Shri Gusainji's tent Kumbhanadas began to sing softly of his anguish :

* * * * *

How many days have passed without seeing
that young lad, the amorous son of Nanda
upon whose face appears a light moustache ?
His glance, his grin enchant.
He is dressed like an elegant dancer.

His beauty, his splendor,
his face outshines ten million moons.

Ah, my heart hopes
for the fair Shyam's arrival,
meeting and play.

Mourns Kumbhanadas, without Krishna
my life is worthless.

* * * * *

Shri Gusainji, overhearing Kumbhanadas's poem of separation, was unable to bear the poet's distress and came out of his tent. There he saw Kumbhanadas's eyes streaming with water.

"Kumbhanadas," he called out, "Your trip to Gujarat is completed. Go have Shri Nathji's sight."

Shri Gusainji knew that Kumbhanadas and the Lord's separation was mutual. Thus, he told the poet to return to the temple.

As a 'bhakta' has a one pointed devotional mood, for Shri Krishna, likewise the Lord cherishes dearly such devotees. Krishna has said in the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna, "As My 'bhaktas' worship Me, so I worship them."

This principle is exemplified in the story of the Vaishnava Gajjan who while fetching Krishna's betel leaves fell unconscious in the street so strongly did he feel separation from his Lord. Meanwhile, Child Krishna refused to partake of the midday offering until Gajjan returned.

Hearing Shri Gusainji's words, Kumbhanadas was soothed. After bowing to his guru, he returned to Shri Nathji's temple where the afternoon 'darshan' had just opened. There, before his beloved Lord, he sang :

* * * * *

Listen friend.

How can those who yearn to meet their lover
in the face of a thousand obstacles
remain without him ?

Those who feel in the hearts
each others separation
are not phased by worldly shame
and infamy.

How can those who are in love,
ponders Kumbhanadas,

bear anything else ?

Without the ardent Mountain Holder
a moment passes like an age.

* * * * *

The poem sung, Shri Nathji hailed Kumbhanadas, "I understand your heart. As you cannot remain without Me, so I can't live without you."

Kumbhanadas bowed to his beloved and prayed, "I wish only this, that I never again be separated from You."

Once, while Kumbhanadas and some other Vaishnavas were sitting with Shri Gusainji, the guru said in a joking spirit, "Kumbhanadas, how many sons do you have ?"

Kumbhanadas replied, "One and a half."

Surprised, Shri Gusainji questioned, "I thought you had seven sons ?"

Kumbhanadas explained, "Of my seven sons, five are worldly. Only Chaturbhujadas is a full son, while Krishnadas, who tends Shri Nathji's cows is half a son."

Why did Kumbhanadas call Krishnadas only a half son ? After all, the young boy performed the great 'seva' of guarding Shri Nathji's cows, a service in which many people have realized Krishna. The nectar of Shri Mahaprabhu's Path of Grace is the devotional mood of the Gopis in which both union with and separation from Krishna are experienced.

Krishnadas, while tending the cows, used to have Shri Nathji's joyful sight, but because he did not experience separation and the intimate Gopi play with Krishna, his father called him a half son. Chaturbhujadas, one

of the Ashta Chhap poets, experienced fully the Lord's union and separation and composed poetry about Krishna's 'lila', and so was considered by his father to be a full-fledged son.

Hearing Kumbhanadas's words, Shri Gusainji agreed, "Kumbhanadas, you are right. An accomplished devotee is a true son, What good are other sons ?

THE STORY OF KRISHNADAS

Once, while Krishnadas was bringing the cows back to the pen, as he reached the southern end of the Govardhana Hill, a tiger emerged from a cave on the hill and started to attack the cows. All the cows except one, who had enormous udders and yielded an exceptionally large quantity of milk, returned safely home. Just as the tiger was about to pounce on that one big, slow moving cow, Krishnadas jumped in front of the aggressive beast and shouted, "Unrighteous one, that cow belongs to Shri Nathji ! If you are hungry, then devour me."

The lumbering cow managed to return unharmed to the cowpen, but the tiger killed Krishnadas. Meanwhile, one of the other cowherds, Gopinathji, a great 'bhakta', saw Shri Nathji in the cowpen milking that big cow and Krishnadas holding her calf while its mother licked it. Kumbhanadas also had that same sight. After Shri Nathji milked the cow, he returned to the temple where Shri Gusainji offered Him His supper. Returning from the cowpen, as Kumbhanadas reached the point just below Shri Nathji's temple, someone informed him that his son had just been killed by a tiger. Hearing the news, Kumbhanadas fell to the ground unconscious. Many Braja Vasis rushed to the aid of Kumbhanadas, but none were able to bring him back to his senses. Meanwhile, someone told Shri Gusainji, "Kumbhanadas's son Krishnadas was killed by a tiger while he was saving one of Shri Nathji's cows. His body is at the far end of the Govardhana Hill."

Shri Gusainji interjected, "Don't say it like that, that cow would never desert Krishnadas."

Those who leave their bodies in the service of cows achieve the supreme realm. Thus, the cow would never leave Krishnadas.

When Shri Gusainji asked, "Where is Kumbhanadas," one Vaishnava replied, "He is lying unconscious at the bottom of the Govardhana Hill."

After Shri Gusainji finished Shri Nathji's 'seva', he went down to where Kumbhanadas was lying. All the people who were standing around Kumbhanadas said to Shri Gusainji. "This man is a great 'bhakta', but he is deeply distressed over the death of his son."

Shri Gusainji explained, "What do you know ? He is not upset about his son, rather he is concerned that he will not be able to have Shri Nathji's 'darshan' for the period of 'sutaka' which he must observe.¹ Now I will remove your doubts about Kumbhanadas."

Shri Gusainji revealed to them the character of an enlightend 'bhakta' by calling out, "Kumbhanadas ! Come tomorrow for Shri Nathji's 'darshan'.²

Hearing Shri Gusainji's word, Kumbhanadas immediately arose and paid homage to Shri Gusainji, "Other than you, who can know the workings of my heart ?"

1. When a family member passes away, the relatives undergo a period of 'sutaka', a state of impurity in which they are prohibited from entering the temple and participating in other religious activities for a number of days.
2. Shri Gusainji, having compassion for the poet's divine distress at the thought of his separation from his Lord, broke the traditional 'sutaka' for the great poet and allowed a special time, once a day, when he would be able to see Shri Nathji.

Shri Gusainji assured him, "I know that nothing worldly can affect you. If any Vaishnava has your association for even a moment, they will also become freed from mundane pains. Now go perform your son's last rites and then come to the temple tomorrow for Shri Nathji's sight."

Shri Gusainji then retired to his home where many Vaishnavas gathered around him. The cowherd, Gopinathji, came there and explained to Shri Gusainji, "Krishnadas was killed by a tiger at the tail end of the Govardhana Hill, yet I just saw Shri Nathji milking a cow, and Krishnadas with Him in the cowpen holding her calf."

"That is not surprising," remarked Shri Gusainji. "Krishnadas is a saint. In order to save Shri Nathji's cow, he allowed the tiger to kill him. Shri Nathji is pleased with Krishnadas and has accepted him into His eternal 'lila'. Because you are a good 'bhakta', you have been granted this rare sight."

Ever since Kumbhanadas was allowed Shri Nathji's sight at the time of his son's death, it is the custom, to this day, at Shri Nathji's temple, to allow people who are in 'sutaka' to have Shri Nathji's sight before everyone else. In this way, the Lord and His devotees are both pleased.

The following morning, Kumbhanadas was allowed to have Shri Nathji's 'darshan' ahead of the other Vaishnavas. After having the Lord's sight, Kumbhanadas returned to Parasoli where he sang poems of separation to his beloved Shri Nathji :

* * * * *

Gopal, not meeting you,
the cool moon scorches her,
its rays are like fire.

Lotus petals seem to her
like snake's venom,

Flowers and sandal paste are no longer pleasing,
they just intensify the fire in her body.

Says Kumbhanadas,
Lord, you are the Dark Cloud.

Without you, she is like a golden vine
withered from the summer's heat.

Holder of the Mountain,
perfuse her with the nectar of your lips.

* * * * *

Now the days and nights
last as long as mountains.
Since Hari went to Mathura,
time doesn't move.

The creator makes a few hours
pass like an age.
I awake.
It won't leave me,
This separation has become my friend.

The Braja people are feeble, confounded,
lifeless like the lotus
that has endured a frost.

Says Kumbhanadas. separation from the
son of Nanda
generates a lot of pain.

Without Krishna,
my eyes shed constant tears.

* * * * *

Others remain near to him,
but separation is my allotment.
My Friend, while others sleep blissfully,
my yearnings fill the four quarters.

I can't understand the creator's plan.
What angered him when he wrote my fate ?

Kumbhanadas repeatedly chants Giridhar's name
day and night, like a Chataka bird
that thirsts for its cloud.

* * * * *

Kumbhanadas passed his twelve days of 'sutaka' singing these and other songs of separation. Then he began again to sing before Shri Nathji.

KUMBHANADAS GOES TO GOKUL

Once, Shri Gusainji's sons, Gokulnathji and Shri Bal-krishnaji, approached their father, "Kumbhanadas has never gone to Gokul to have the 'darshan' of Shri Navanita Priyaji."

Shri Gusainji remarked, "Kumbhanadas is thoroughly absorbed in the intimate 'lilas' that are connected with Shri Nathji and this Govardhana Hill."

"We should try to bring him to Gokul," suggested Gokulnathji. "If he does not come, then we will know that is the Lord's wish."

"You may try," Shri Gusainji explained, "but Kumbhanadas will not cross the Yamuna river."

After a few days, Shri Gusainji went to Gokul. On the eleventh lunar day of the bright half of the month Vaishaka (April May) Gokulnathji told his older brother, "Shri Gusainji

is in Gokul. Why don't we proceed there with Kumbhanadas ?"

Balkrishnaji questioned, "How will we go ? You know Kumbhanadas will not sit upon a horse or any other vehicle."

Shri Gokulnathji began explaining, "Yes, that is true. Nor will Kumbhanadas leave Shri Nathji to go anywhere. We will do this : The nights are bright now, we will all walk to Gokul. Just see what a spectacle will happen. This will be a great excuse for us to benefit from his enlightening association."

That evening after the two brothers completed Shri Nathji's 'seva', Shri Gokulnathji grabbed Kumbhanadas's hand and began to talk with him about Krishna's divine sports. Kumbhanadas, emmersed in the nectar of those talks, did not notice that they were leading him towards Gokul. Balkrishnaji and a few other Vaishnavas walked along listening in silence. While on the way to Gokul, Shri Gokulnathji questioned Kumbhanadas, "Does Shri Nathji ever make Shri Svaminiji's ornamentation.?"

Kumbhanadas, engrossed in the love of the divine couple, began explaining, "One night, during the month of Ashvina (Sept-Oct.) Shri Svaminiji accompanied by other Gopis went out to the forest to pick flowers. There, near the 'rasa' dance circle, Vishakhaji Gopi began to make Shri Svaminiji's ornamentation. Shri Nathji then appeared on the scene and requested, "Tonight, let Me adorn her."

"When He went over to His consort, the clever Gopi Vishakhaji knew that Shri Nathji could not remain long without seeing Shri Svaminiji's face and put a mirror in front of Svaminiji so that He could stand behind her and still behold her countenance. The Blessed Lord then began to lace pearls into her pigtail. After a long time of delicately arranging her hair, He glanced into the mirror. Upon seeing Shri Svaminiji's splendid face, He forgot His task and dropped her braid, causing all the pearls to scatter upon the ground. Everyone began to laugh and one Gopi commented, "It took You so

much time to do that and, in a moment, everything has fallen apart."

"Shri Nathji then told Vishakha Gopi, "You hold her hair while I interlace it again with pearls."

"After all the pearls were gathered once more Shri Svaminiji's hair was decorated. Meanwhile, some of the other Gopis made flower ornaments for her which they handed to Shri Nathji. As He put them on her, He snatched glances of her moonlike face, His every pore filled with the greatest joy. After completing her ornamentation He put 'khol' around her eyes, a dot on her forehead, and henna upon her feet. Then, Shri Svaminiji made Shri Nathji's ornamentation and they delighted together in many kinds of love play."

In the time Kumbhanadas related the intimate pastimes of the Divine Couple, they reached the banks of the Yamuna river. By that time, the sun had risen and Shri Gusainji had boarded a boat to cross to where Kumbhanadas and his sons had arrived. Suddenly Kumbhanadas became conscious that it was morning and that he was far away from his Shri Nathji. He withdrew his hand from Gokulnathji's and in great distress ran away shouting, "Who will sing songs to Shri Nathji? I have lost my 'seva'!"

Shri Gokulnathji, Shri Balkrishnaji and all the other Vaishnavas unsuccessfully raced after him until Shri Gusainji approached them and said, "How do you expect to catch him? Why did you bring him here. He will never cross the Yamuna river. I told you this before."

"So what if he won't cross the Yamuna," said Gokulnathji. "We have heard for the entire night all sorts of transcendental things from Kumbhanadas. That was our great fortune. To have the association of a 'bhakta' like him for even a moment is rare."

Hearing that, Shri Gusainji agreed, "What you say is true, but now Kumbhanadas has to run back to the Govardha-

Hill. Only when Kumbhanadas sings songs of awakeniag will Shri Nathji arise. Shri Nathji is dependent upon devotees like Kumbhanadas. If you want to hear about the Lord from him, you should visit him at his home in Yamunavata. There Kumbhanadas will enlighten you."

Gokulnathji, Balkrishnaji and all the Vaishnavas then proceeded to Gokul while Shri Gusainji mounted his swift horse and chased after Kumbhanadas. When he reached the running poet, Shri Gusainji said, "You don't know the way, follow me."

Kumbhanadas followed Shri Gusainji all the way to the Govardhana Hill. By that time, it was about two hours after the sun had risen and the temple priest and cooks were just walking up the hill to start the morning 'seva'. Shri Gusainji asked the head priest, Ramdas, "Why are you so late today in awakening the Lord?"

Ramdas explained, "I don't know what is wrong today. We have all bathed four times. Each time we would touch someone or something impure and have to bathe again. This is now our fifth bath."

Shri Gusainji explained, "This is all Shri Nathji's spectacle for His 'bhakta', Kumbhanadas."

Shri Gusainji then sounded the conch and awoke Shri Nathji while Kumbhanadas sang a song of awakening. Kumbhanadas was overjoyed that he had not missed any of his singing 'seva'. In this way, Kumbhanadas was so totally emmersed in Shri Nathji that he never managed to ever make it to Gokul.

TEMPLE ATTENDANCE

Once, while Kumbhanadas was sitting by his fields, Shri Nathji came there and started playing in front of him. When

it became time for the afternoon 'seva', Kumbhanadas began to leave his fields for the Govardhana Hill when Shri Nathji asked him, "Where are you going?"

Kumbhanadas replied, "I am going the temple to have Shri Nathji's 'darshan'."

Astonished, Shri Nathji questioned, "Why are you going to the temple to have My sight when I am playing here in front of you?"

To this Kumbhanadas explained, "Maharaja, now you are giving me Your sight, but if all of a sudden you should run away, I can do nothing to stop You. In Your temple, though, it is a different story. There, Shri Mahaprabhu has firmly established You eternally. You must give 'darshan' to everyone. Also, I am attached to seeing You in Your home atop the Govardhana Hill. It is from making Your 'seva' and having Your sight in the temple that I am able to experience Your grace as I do now when You appear to me in my home. For this reason it is imperative that I go have Your 'darshan' in the temple."

The Blessed Lord laughed and said, "Your devotional sentiments are truly divine. This is why I can't leave you for a single moment."

Kumbhanadas and Shri Nathji then set out together for the Govardhana Hill. When they reached the Govinda lake at the bottom of the Govardhana Hill, the conch sounded, which signalled the commencement of the afternoon 'seva'. At that point, Shri Nathji returned to His temple while Kumbhanadas climbed the hill and there had his Blessed Lord's sight in the temple.¹

1. To have the sight of Shri Nathji in the temple and make His 'seva' is not a means to achieve Krishna, but a divine fruit. In the path of grace the means is the fruit and vice versa. This account exemplifies this concept.

KUMBHANADAS OFFERS SHRI NATHJI MANGOES

One day, a gardener came to the Chandra lake with a large basket of beautiful mangoes and began to wash them in the lake there, when Kumbhanadas, returning from Shri Nathji's temple went to the Chandrasarovar lake to drink some water. There, seeing the gardener's mangoes Kumbhanadas considered, "Those beautiful fruits are fit for Shri Nathji" and asked, "How much are they?"

The gardener replied, "In Mathura, I will get ten rupees for them."

Kumbhanadas, not having any money, was unable to purchase the mangoes but offered them mentally to Shri Nathji, "You only relish the highest quality things. Partake of these mangoes."

Shri Nathji then came there and enjoyed the mangoes, but because their physical appearance was in no way altered, the gardener was unaware that Shri Nathji had partaken of his fruit and took them to Mathura. There, one Rajaput from Matha who had come to the city on business purchased one hundred of those mangoes from the gardener for ten rupees. Accompanied by one Brahmin, he brought them to the banks of the Yamuna river where they sat together eating mangoes. That evening, both fell asleep and dreamed of Shri Nathji. When the Rajaput awoke, he asked the Brahmin, "Have you seen anything?"

The Brahmin replied, "I just dreamed about Shri Nathji."

"Where does Shri Nathji reside?" questioned the Rajaput.

When the Brahmin replied that Shri Nathji's temple was fourteen miles from Mathura, the Rajaput exclaimed, "You are a fool. Why do you wander about uselessly after having Shri Nathji's sight? I have just seen His form in a dream

and now I can't remain without Him. I'll give you all the mangoes and five rupees if you will take me to Shri Nathji's temple in the morning."

The Brahmin agreed and when the sun rose they set out for the Govardhana Hill and arrived just in time to have Shri Nathji's evening 'darshan'. Beholding Shri Nathji, the Rajaput's heart was stolen away. After 'darshan', the Rajaput gave that Brahmin his arms, garments and five rupees, keeping only ten rupees for himself. The Brahmin set out for his home in Mathura while the Rajaput put on a 'dhoti' and stood by the bottom of the Govardhana Hill when Shri Gusainji happened to pass. The Rajaput bowed humbly before the guru and prayed, "I have wandered about uselessly for such a long time. Now accept me and keep me close to your feet."

Shri Gusainji told him, "This spiritual condition of yours is the result of Kumbhanadas's grace. You have been blessed."

Shri Gusainji initiated the Rajaput who offered him ten rupees, but Shri Gusainji told him, "You have given all your money to that Brahmin. Keep these ten rupees for your expenses."

"Maharaj, the Rajaput interjected, "Now that I have taken your shelter, what use is this money to me?"

Later, the Rajaput questioned Shri Gusainji, "In my previous birth who was I and what pious deed has allowed me your sight?"

Shri Gusainji then explained, "In your previous birth, you were an armed guard for Krishna's father's cows. Once, you killed a snake, and, because of that sin, you have had to take repeated births. Because you partook of the mangoes that Kumbhanadas mentally offered to Shri Nathji, you dreamed of Shri Nathji. You are a divine soul, while the Brahmin is not. Though he had Shri Nathji's sight, he did not achieve

knowledge. Your name in the 'lila' was Nena. Now you should again be an armed guard for Shri Nathji's cows. I will supply you with garments and a weapon. Take your meals daily at the temple. Today fast; tomorrow, I will initiate you with 'Brahma Sambandha'."

The following day, the Rajaput took 'Brahma Sambandha'. From that day, he would ride upon a horse and guard Shri Nathji's cows as they grazed in the fields. Shri Nathji's form was implanted in his heart and not long after he began to have Shri Nathji's sight amidst all of his cows. In time, that Rajaput became an enlightened 'bhakta'.

Once, when the Rajaput's two sons came to visit their father, he told them, "The Lord has graced me with this 'seva'. Take care of the home and don't wait for me. I will never return. You should consider me as dead."

His two sons then returned home and told everyone that their father had become a renunciate.

Kumbhanadas was such a great devotee that, simply by mentally offering those mangoes to Shri Nathji, the Rajaput received divine favor. Kumbhanadas's wife and five sons, although not divine in nature, became liberated through Kumbhanadas's association.

SHRI GUSAINJI'S BIRTHDAY

Once, when Shri Gusainji's birthday was about to occur, Shri Nathji thought, "As my appearance day is celebrated throughout the world, so should be Shri Gusainji's."

A day before Shri Gusainji's birthday, while Ramdas was adorning Govardhananathji, Kumbhanadas was singing about Shri Nathji's ornamentation. At that time, Shri Nathji told Ramdas, "Shri Gusainji makes extensive celebrations for My birth day. This year I wish to do the same for him. Everyone should join together in his birthday festivities, and special preparations should be made."

When Ramdas asked, "What should we prepare?" Shri Gusainji replied, "'Jelabis'."¹

Both Ramdas and Kumbhanadas were pleased with the Lord's idea. After Ramdas completed the daily 'seva', he gathered all the people who made 'seva' in the temple and told them, "Tomorrow for Shri Gusainji's birthday an elaborate offering will be made."

Sadu Pande brought some ghee and flour while Kumbhanadas immediately returned home. Anxious to help in the celebrations, but not having any money, he sold his four buffalo calves for five rupees and gave the money to Ramdas. Everyone in the temple gave at least one or two rupees which allowed them to purchase the sugar needed for the preparations. For the entire night they stayed up making 'jelabis'. The following morning Shri Nathji was bathed and adorned in saffron cloths and a peacock feather crown, all of which Shri Gusainji had made himself and sent from Gokul. After the foodstuffs were offered, Shri Nathji requested Kumbhanadas, "Sing something in praise of Shri Gusainji's birthday."

* * * * *

Kumbhanadas sang :

* * * * *

Today, by Shri Vallabh's door is a celebration.
To reveal His incarnation and His 'lila'
the Lord appears as Vallabh's son.

For divine souls a great fortune has appeared.
He uplifts those without means.

1. 'Jelabi' looks like pretzels but is very sweet and soft and made from pastry flour and yogurt and fried in ghee and glazed with a sugar solution.

Says Kumbhanadas, "The Holder of the Mountain,
Shri Vallabh and Shri Gusainji
are the essence of all scripture
and spiritual practice."

* * * * *

Shri Vallabh has manifested again.

Multiplying the nectar of 'seva' and
uncovering the esoteric knowledge,
he has purified all his soul.

In every home
festive festoons are hung.

Says Kumbhanadas, "The bards glorify
the qualities of Krishna."

* * * * *

Shri Govardhananathji enjoyed those and other poems Kumbhanadas sang in praise of Shri Gusainji. Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji finished the 'seva' at Gokul and then rode to Shri Nathji's temple. By the time he entered the temple it was time to remove the offering. When Shri Gusainji saw the baskets full of 'jelabis' he asked, amazed, "What great event occurred today that inspired you to offer 'jelabis'?"

Ramdas replied, "Shri Nathji wanted to celebrate your birthday. All the people in the temple helped in the preparations."

Shri Gusainji completed the day's 'seva' and returned to his home at the bottom of the hill. There he called Ramdas and asked, "How was it possible to offer all those opulent foodstuffs when only a few poor people work in the temple?"

Ramdas explained, "Ghee and flour came from Sadu Pande, Kumbhanadas gave five rupees, while everyone else

gave one or two rupees. In this way twentyone rupees were collected which was used in purchasing the sugar."

All of a sudden Kumbhanadas arrived and bowed to Shri Gusainji. Then guru inquired, "Kumbhanadas, where did you get five rupees? I know the meager circumstances of your home."

"Where is my home?" declared Kumbhanadas. "My home is at your lotus feet. I had four too many buffalo calves so I sold them. Only when one's body, life, breath, house, wife and children are offered to you can Vaishnava dharma be lived in perfection. How can a worldly householder like myself live within the Vaishnava dharma? Knowing to be humble you have graced me."

Hearing Kumbhanadas's words, Shri Gusainji's heart filled with emotion for the poet saint and said, "Through Shri Mahaprabhu's grace, Kumbhanadas has achieved true humility. Shri Krishna remains forever near to him."

Kumbhanadas was indeed a vessel of grace.

MAHAPRABHU TEACHES KUMBHANADAS

Once, Kumbhanadas asked Shri Mahaprabhu about the principles of the Path of Grace. In response, Shri Mahaprabhu explained to him the eightyfour signs of the different types of 'bhaktas', the way to perform 'seva' throughout the day, as well as the different sentiments of Krishna's child and boyhood 'lilas'. Shri Mahaprabhu explained, "Those souls upon whom Shri Nathji has showered His mercy will ask questions and receive answers. Now, a very difficult time is coming when there will be no one to ask nor will there be answers to such vital questions."

As the Honess's milk can only be kept in a gold bowl, in the same way, true 'dharma' and the love of the Lord's 'lilas' can only remain in the hearts of accomplished 'bhaktas',

THREE DAUGHTERS

One day Kumbhanadas submitted to Shri Gusainji, "My seven daughters, five of my seven sons, their wives and my own wife don't have any love for God, while my niece has firm 'bhakti'. Why is that?"

Shri Gusainji began explaining, "Kumbhanadas, listen carefully to what I relate. It is a story from one of the Puranas. There was a Brahmin who, desirous of arranging his daughter's marriage, sent forth four Brahmins in search of a proper husband. In the surrounding towns, the four Brahmins made four different engagements and returned, each of them saying, 'I have arranged your daughter's engagement. The marriage will occur after one month.'

"The father exclaimed, 'I have only one daughter, and you have made four different engagements. How is it possible for her to marry all four?'

"The Brahmins replied, 'We have done what you have told us. If you do not conclude her marriage after one month, we will kill ourselves and the murder will lie in your hands. The contracts we have made are unbreakable. We will come a day before the wedding.' The Brahmins said before leaving.

"The girl's father became very disturbed over the situation to the point that he stopped eating. For four days he remained hungry. On the fifth day, while he was beside a river performing his prayers, a saint happened to pass by to bathe. The saint, seeing the girl's father weeping in distress, was moved with compassion. Unable to bear his pain, the saint questioned, 'Brahmin, why are you so anguished?'

"After he explained the cause of his worries, the saint replied, 'I normally do not remain in any single place, but for you, I will stay here by this river, though you must not reveal me to anyone. Remind me one day before the marriage. Don't worry, God will complete everything. Return home and eat something.'

On the eve of the appointed wedding, the girl's father returned to the saint by the river and prayed, 'The wedding will occur in the morning. Now, please tell me your solution.'

"Come this evening,' the saint replied.

"That evening the saint told him, 'Whatever animals pass your way, bring them all here.'

"The girl's father brought the saint a cat, dog and a donkey. The saint then told him to put the three animals along with his sleeping daughter into a room and then lock it. In accordance with the saint's plan, after his daughter had gone to sleep, he put her on her bed and locked her in a room with the beasts. Later that evening, the four grooms arrived with the four different Brahmins. When the time for the wedding ceremony drew near, the saint told the girl's father to open the room. When he did, he was amazed to see four girls, each appearing exactly like his daughter. After the four girls were married off, the girl's father gave appropriate gifts to the Brahmins and bowed at the saint's feet and prayed, 'You have saved my life. Ask of me whatever you desire.'

"The saint replied, 'I don't desire anything. The Lord has removed your pain.'

"The girl's father questioned, 'How will I know to which man my daughter was married?'

"The saint explained, 'In a few days, invite your four son-in-laws to dinner and ask them about their wives. Know your daughter to be with the one who described his wife as having human qualities.'

"Not long after, the Brahmin called his four son-in-laws and asked each of them separately if his daughter was suitable for him. The first said, 'Your daughter has all qualities, but she barks like a dog. She can't control her tongue, nor does she have clean habits.'

"When he asked the second son-in-law the same question he replied, 'Although she has some fine attributes, she is glut-

tonous. She even eats the food we set aside for the Lord's offerings and, like a cat, does not feel satisfied unless she eats food from five different houses.'

"Upon asking the third son-in-law he was met with the reply, 'She has some fine merits but she brays like a donkey, is always dirty, and kicks with both of her feet like an ass.'

"Upon questioning the fourth son-in-law about his daughter he heard, 'How can I sufficiently praise your daughter? She is like the goddess of wealth. She speaks sweetly to everyone, has good habits and is devoted to me, the guru, the Lord, as well as to the other Vaishnavas.'

"The Brahmin then knew that that was his daughter. From that day he called on only that son-in-law.

"So, Kumbhanadas, if a person has the traits of a Vaishnava, they are truly human. What is the difference if someone has a human form? Ravana and Kumbhakarna, although human in physical appearance, were demonical. A person's real nature should be known through his or her actions. Your niece is a great 'bhakta' and through your association will reach spiritual perfection."

This is the story told to Kumbhanadas and a few other Vaishnavas sitting there.

KUMBHANADAS'S PASSING AWAY

After performing Shri Nathji's 'seva' for many years, Kumbhanadas's body became weak. One day he sat by Sankarshana lake just below Shri Nathji's temple. His son, Chaturbhujadas, approached him and said, "Shall I carry you home?"

"Let me rest here. In an hour or so I will leave this body," replied Kumbhanadas.

His son then went to Shri Nathji's temple. Arriving at the temple, Shri Gusainji inquired of Chaturbhujadas, "Where is Kumbhanadas? How is he?"

Chaturbhujadas replied, "He is by the Sankarshana lake."

Shri Gusainji hurried there and asked Kumbhanadas, "Which 'lila' are you thinking?"

Unable to stand, Kumbhanadas nodded his head and mentally bowed to Shri Gusainji before singing :

* * * * *

Friend, he forgot that he was milking the cow.

He couldn't take his eyes off
her incomparable moon-like face.

That fresh marvelous lady is very clever,
her every limb is wonderfully formed.

The heart of Kumbhanadas's Lord,
The Holder of the Mountain,
was swept away by her arched eyebrow.

* * * * *

Krishna, your gaze has stolen my mind,
I am unable to traverse the road from
Nanda Gar to Barson.¹

* * * * *

When Shri Gusainji asked him again about where his heart was, Kumbhanadas broke into song :

* * * * *

(A messenger tries to break Radha's Mana)

1. This poem seems to be incomplete, hence I have not been able to give a full rendering.

To meet you, the Holder of the Muntain
has tried many things.

Oh, silly women, answer me.
What is it with you ?

Look, you are sitting by a window,
your form beautified by a shimmering sari.

Your mind and body
rest within the Love of your Life.

Not for a single moment
is your heart apart from him.

(Radha replies)

Sakhi, tell me, by what path should I go
and at what place I can meet him.

(The messenger replies)

Look, the Lord sits in a room up there
decorated with love paintings,
sings Kumbhanadas.

* * * * *

Amrous Radha is drenched
in the mood of intimate love.

The daughter of Brishabhan is a golden vine
wrapped around her Lord, a dark Tamal tree.

Where did you learn to sport like that
with the Holder of the Mountain ?

Kumbhanadas's Lord Shri Nathji's
love play is great.

* * * * *

After singing that poem, Kumbhanadas left his body and entered the Lord's 'lila'. Shri Gusainji returned to the temple while Chaturbhujadas and his other brothers performed their father's last rites. Shri Gusainji finished Shri Nathji's 'seva' that afternoon but he did not pass a single word with anyone. Ramdas then questioned him, "Maharaj, what has happened?"

Shri Gusainji eulogized Kumbhanadas saying, "A great 'bhakta' has left this world."

Kumbhanadas's life story is truly unequalled.

KRISHNADAS

In the 'lila', Krishnadas's form, at night, is Lalita while during the day he is as Krishna's friend. Rishabha. His door on the Govardhana Hill is at the Bilachu lake which faces Radha's town of Barsana. On the way to perform the 'rasa lila', Shri Krishna passed by that lake.

Krishnadas was born into a 'sudra' family in Gujarat in the town of Chilotara. His father ruled the town. At the time of Krishnadas's birth, his father called upon some learned Brahmins from the neighboring towns and promised that anyone who could tell him about his son's destiny, would be supported for the rest of his life. The Brahmins told him, "We don't care if you give us anything. Your son will be a great 'bhakta' and will not remain in your home. He should be called Krishnadas." Krishnadas's father was distressed to hear the Brahmins' predictions. After rewarding them, the newborn child was named Krishnadas.

At the tender age of five, Krishnadas developed a taste for hearing of the Lord's divine exploits. Whenever his parents refused to tell him about such things, he would start to cry and refuse to eat or drink anything. He passed his childhood listening to God's glories.

Once, a grain dealer arrived and set up his shop on the outskirts of Krishnadas's town where he soon netted a profit of 14,000 rupees. Krishnadas's father hired a thief to steal all the merchant's money, of which he gave the thief 1,000 rupees. Krishnadas, learning of this event, approached his

father and said, "You have done an evil thing. Good will come to you only when you repay that grain dealer all the stolen money."

Krishnadas's father angrily hit his son and said, "Don't mention what I did to anyone. I rule over this town, it is my right to do things like that."

Krishnadas replied, "Something terrible will happen to you."

The following morning, the distressed grain dealer came before Krishnadas's father and told him about the robbery. Krishnadas's father rebuked him, "Why didn't you remain within the town's limits," and then had his men remove him from the city.

Krishnadas privately approached the grain merchant and told him that his father had instigated the theft and had retained most of the stolen money. He advised the man, "Go to Raja Nagar (Ahemdabad) and tell the king there what has happened. I will be your witness, but you must not allow my father or the thief to be executed."

The grain dealer proceeded to Raja Nagar where he related the entire incident to the king there who was very impressed with Krishnadas's honesty and sent 50 soldiers to fetch him and his father. When they arrived in Raja Nagar, the king asked Krishnadas's father, "Did you steal the grain merchant's money?"

He replied, "Someone has falsely accused me. I did not take his money."

The king then questioned, "Will you accept your son's testimony as the truth?"

"Yes," affirmed Krishnadas's father.

Krishnadas began explaining, "My father gave the thief one thousand of the grain merchant's rupees and kept 13,000

for himself. I told him at that time that he had done a terrible thing but he did not heed my words. For this reason he must suffer the consequences."

After confessing, Krishnadas's father told the king that he would repay the grain merchant the entire sum. The king sent two men with Krishnadas's father to insure the safe arrival of the grain merchant's money and dethroned Krishnadas's father of his rule over the town. The king requested Krishnadas to remain with him in his royal court but Krishnadas replied, "What will I do here? When I speak the truth, no one will appreciate it. It is better that I become a renunciate," and went home with his father.

His father returned all of the grain merchant's money, but reprimanded Krishnadas, "You have done a terrible thing. I have lost my money as well as my rule."

Krishnadas replied, "It is you who have done evil. If you had not confessed, your life here as well as in the heavens would have been ruined. It is good that you no longer rule over this town; you would have only incurred more sin."

His father sighed, "You have made us both beggars. Take some money and go far from this town. Your absence will not in any way pain me."

With the idea of starting a pilgrimage, Krishnadas renounced his home and travelled to Mathura. There he bathed in the Yamuna river and heard that Shri Nathji's temple had been constructed not faraway. In a few days, Shri Nathji, who was known to fulfil everyone's wishes, would be installed within the temple chamber. Eager to have Shri Nathji's sight, Krishnadas headed for the Govardhana Hill. When he arrived at the temple, Shri Mahaprabhu was waving the lights around Shri Nathji. From that instant, Shri Nathji swept Krishnadas's heart away. Shri Nathji, seeing Krishnadas, mentioned to Shri Mahaprabhu, "After such a long separation from me, Krishnadas has finally come."

Shri Mahaprabhu then approached the 'bhakta', "Come, Krishnadas!" Krishnadas bowed before Shri Mahaprabhu

and requested initiation. The guru initiated him right there before Shri Nathji. Because Krishnadas was a divine soul, right after initiation he began to experience all the Lord's 'lilas' and broke out in verse :

* * * * *

Know Shri Vallabh to be the uplifter of the fallen.
Those who take his shelter see the 'lila'.
Krishna remains with them.

Why waste your days in useless spiritual pursuits
not knowing Shri Vallabh's form ?

Says Krishnadas,
"Those who have received his graceful glances
the fruit of fruits,
are not born again."

* * * * *

Shri Mahaprabhu enjoyed Krishnadas's poem and then completed the morning 'seva'.

On Akshyatritya the temple was completed. Shri Mahaprabhu installed Shri Nathji into His new home and requested his disciple, Sadu Pande, to perform Shri Nathji's 'seva', but Sadu Pande replied, "We are simple local people and don't know anything about proper mode of worship. Besides, we have many household chores. It is better that you employ some Bengalees who live a few miles from here, by Radha's lake.¹ They are always engaged in chanting the Lord's name."

Shri Mahaprabhu replied, "Call them here."

Some twenty or thirty Bengalees then came to live by the Rudra lake at the bottom of the Govardhana Hill

1. Shri Krishna Chaitanya was a contemporary of Shri Vallabhacharya who created a large following of Krishna devotees, mostly from Bengal.

and daily performed Shri Nathji's services. Krishnadas was put in charge of collecting gifts for the temple.

MIRABAI

Once, as Krishnadas was returning from Dwarka, where he had gone to collect offerings for Shri Nathji, he stopped at the home of the Rajasthani saint, Mirabai. Many other people were staying there, with the expectation of receiving some gifts from her. Within a short time, Krishnadas told Mirabai, "I must head on my way."

Mirabai requested, "Why don't you stay here for a while ?"

Krishnadas replied, "I stay only in those places where I can have the association of Shri Mahaprabhu's disciples."

When Mirabai tried to give him 11 gold coins as an offering to Shri Nathji, Krishnadas refused them saying, "Because you are not Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple I can't accept your offerings," and left.

The Vaishnavas accompanying Krishnadas asked, "Why did you refuse her coins ?"

Krishnadas explained, "Vaishnavas will offer Shri Nathji plenty of gifts. There is no lack of funds. I wanted to put all the people there in their place by showing them that I, a low class 'shudra', could elicit a gift from her immediately, and moreover refuse it, while the Brahmins have been waiting greedily for days without receiving anything. Now they will consider, "If Shri Mahaprabhu's follower is so righteous, just imagine how great the guru himself must be." Krishnadas concluded explaining, "We should not accept gifts from outsiders."

In the Shiksha Patra, it is mentioned that misery occurs when one associates with those on other paths. If one must have contact with such people, Shri Gusainji has advised that one's spiritual 'dharma' should be kept concealed.

THE REMOVAL OF THE BENGALLEES

The Bengalees performed the services of Shri Nathji, for many years. But ultimately they were removed by Krishnadas on the advice of Avadhutadas, Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple.

Avadhutadas was born a few miles from the Govardhana Hill in Ading. After becoming Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple, he requested the boon, "Allow Shri Nathji to remain forever within my heart as I wander all over the Braja land."

Shri Mahaprabhu, by sprinkling some water over him, made Avadhutadas's body divine and unobstructed by hunger, thirst, or any other bodily functions. From that day he remained forever merged in the Bliss of Shri Krishna's joyous from.

Krishnadas wrote a letter to Shri Gusainji in which he related that the Bengalees had finally been removed despite their efforts to gain the emperor's support, and requested him to come quickly to the Govardhana Hill. Receiving Krishnadas's letter, Shri Gusainji immediately headed for Shri Nathji's temple. Arriving there, he officially made Krishnadas the temple manager, praised him for removing the Bengalees, and told him to continue performing the temple's arrangements with great care.

Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji allowed Brahmins from Gujarat to perform Shri Nathji's 'seva' and put Ramdas in charge of the worship.

Many years before, while in Dwarka, Ramdas became Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple. He stayed with Shri Mahaprabhu for some time and learned all about Krishna's 'seva'. One day, Ramdas requested Shri Mahaprabhu, "I have not studied any scripture, but I have a great wish to read your writings."

Shri Mahaprabhu instilled in him his teachings, which filled Ramdas's heart with Shri Krishna's 'lila'. Ramdas then sang before Shri Mahaprabhu :

* * * * *

O Sakhi, proceed to the open Braja market.
Hari's love is for sale.

It's damn cheap;
exchange it for your life.
There the laws are upside down.

Ordinarily, It's so hard to get,
even if you would pay a billion gold pieces.

Says Ramdas, "Krishna is a priceless jewel.
Friend, find him over there."

* * * * *

Ramdas pleased Shri Mahaprabhu with this and other songs. Later, he returned home where he performed his Lord's 'seva' for many weeks until a Vaishnava visited him. Ramdas offered his hospitality and told him, "It is rare to have the association of a Vaishnava. You have blessed me by coming here."

The Vaishnava replied, "It is worth your while to spend some time with the great devotee Padmanabhadas. From a single moment of contact with him, one receives the Lord's grace." When the Vaishnava departed, Ramdas went to Kanauja where Padmanabhadas lived and stayed with him for one month, immersed in talks about the Lord. Ramdas left his 'svarupa' with Padmanabhadas and proceeded to Shri Nathji's temple where Shri Gusainji made him the temple priest. After Padmanabhadas left his body, Ramdas's 'svarupa' came to Shri Nathji's temple and remains with Shri Gusainji's family to the present day.

From that time, Shri Gusainji began to expand Shri Nathji's 'seva', making opulent offerings and ornamentation. Tailors, goldsmiths and other skilled people came to serve in the temple. Shri Gusainji adorned Shri Nathji and left all the other temple responsibilities to Krishnadas. Wherever Krishnadas went, he was accompanied by 25 men, a chariot, horses and wagons. He became famous throughout the land.

Krishnadas was a great 'bhakta' who had received divine favor and composed new songs one for Shri Nathji every day.¹

'RASA LILA'

One day, Shri Nathji told Krishnadas, "Tonight, after the temple 'seva' is completed, proceed to Parasoli by the Chandra lake with the drummer Shyamkumhar. There I will make 'rasa lila'." Afterwards, Shri Nathji told the musician, "Bring your drum wherever Krishnadas tells you."

Shri Gusainji initiated Shyamkumhar at Gokul. When Shri Nathji's 'seva' became opulent, Krishnadas thought that Shri Nathji should have a drummer and requested Shri Gusainji to allow Shyamkumhar in Shri Nathji's 'seva'. Shri Gusainji, agreeing, sent Shyamkumhar to the Govardhana Hill where he played his Mridangam drum before Shri Nathji.

Krishnadas called Shyamkumhar and told him, "Tonight Shri Nathji wishes to make the 'rasa' dance at Parasoli. After the evening 'seva' is completed, bring your drum there. In the early evening both went to the Chandra lake (Parasoli) where they saw the Lord and His consort as other 'Gopis' under the rays of the full spring moon. Shyamkumhar played drums, Krishnadas sang, while Shri Nathji and Shri Svaminiji started to make the divine dance. Krishnadas sang :

1. Shri Gusainji was an artist as well as a musician. The very elaborate 'seva' which is still seen today in Shri Nathji's temple is a continuation of the tradition Shri Gusainji established after the Bengalees were removed. Varied clothes for the different seasons; music with different 'ragas' for each period of the day, each season, as well as for the various festivals; food preparations of the highest quality that change from day to day as well as seasonally; diamonds used in the winter, pearls in the summer, and gold in the spring are just some of the arrangements composed into the ocean of 'seva'. Thus, the arts and literature all flourished, their inspiration continually directed towards pleasing Krishna. Every day became a festival,

* * * * *

The daughter of Brishabhan
with the Holder of the Mountain
dance the 'rasa'¹
to various rhythmic strains
ten beats, seven notes
combine and form the melody Kedara.
The song fluctuates elegantly;
the 'rasa' instills love.

They have found joy
in the power of the dalliance.

Filled with desire, manifold their prosperity,
their faces fresh with full bloom fortune,
their merriment instills love.

Seeing hundreds of women with the Lover
the splendid moon stops in its tracks.

Krishnadas lauding their play,
beautiful, instills love.

* * * * *

After hearing that poem, Krishna was pleased with Krishnadas and gave him the flower garland that adorned His neck. Krishnadas enthralled with his good fortune, filled with bliss, sang :

1. The 'rasa' which Krishna performed with the Gopis of Braja is done in a circle. This celebrated dance has many esoteric meanings. Mahaprabhu has explained that it is a "congregation of divine moods". It is the play in which Krishna awarded the Gopis the supreme reward of His divine association. We find that many of Krishnadas's poems deal with this sublime subject. His greatest attachment was to this 'lila',

* * * * *

In quick and languid beats
thy dexterous lad of Braja
dances the 'rasa'.

Tatathei, tatathei,¹
the syllables resound.

The deer-eyed laughs
Their gait and song
make the moon bashful.

Enmeshed in the trap
of Cupid's brow.

Breasts and belts quiver
earings and beads of sweat
resplendently shimmer.

Anklets and sashes jingle.
They are robed in blue dresses.
Uneven the measure of time
their steps enchant the world.

The enticing lady's man dances elegantly
and gives Krishnadas
the sodden garland from his neck.

* * * * *

Then he sang :

* * * * *

Tatathei, call in the 'rasa' circle
while Radha and Krishna dance.

1. 'Tatathei, tatathei' are the different sounds which the drum makes.
They are sometimes spoken to intensify the beat of the dance.

Melodiously, they sing together,
their tapered eyebrows
arch and flutter.

The lady serenades the Malava melody
and then masterly takes the up-beat.
Her love sounds the flute.

Every hair on the Holder of the Mountain
fills with splendor.

Of all women, sings Krishnadas,
this lady relishes fortune's highest limit.

The mood of their artful play
bewitches my mind.

* * * * *

Krishna is the moon,
the Gopis the stars
as they merge
in the dance of 'rasa'.

Krishna's beaming face
illuminates Vrindavan,
affording young women felicity.

His lotus eyes, delightful, enchanting,
steal the hearts of the Gokul women.

The lover and beloved dance
their lotus hands hold blossomed flowers.

She is filled with the mood of the 'rasa'.
Krishna is most becoming.
Krishnadas's Lord is the Holder of the Mountain,
a prince among appreciators.

* * * * *

and then Krishnadas sang :

* * * * *

As Krishna plays the flute

Radha teaches him.

She puts her arm over his shoulder
places her finger over the seven holes
and plays sweetly.

Harmoniously, the Kanharo 'raga' emerges.

Her neck gracefully moves,
her eyes dance.

Krishnadas celebrates over the wealth
of Krishna and his beloved.

* * * * *

Krishnadas and Shyamkumhar played and sang many songs while Krishna and the Gopis danced in a most amazing fashion. When they had disappeared, Krishnadas and Shyamkumhar returned to the Govardhana Hill.

A CONTEST WITH SURADAS

One day, Suradas told Krishnadas, "All of your poems are copies of my poems."

"Now I will write a poem that does not resemble yours," replied Krishnadas.

Krishnadas then quietly sat down, determined to write something about which Suradas had never written. Thinking for quite a while, he was unable to compose a poem which was not quite similar to one of Sur's. After a few hours of struggle,

he left to take his meals. Meanwhile, Shri Nathji came and wrote on Krishnadas's paper the following poem :

* * * * *

With his cowherds, Krishna comes from
the forest.

His curly locks are covered with the dust of the
'nachuki' cows.

His brow is bowed like the
love god's
His sidelong glances are
the arrows.

His head is embellished with a delightful crown.
His splendid face appears as the moon.

Gazing upon it,
fresh lotus-like women become frenzied.
His closed lips are like the bimba fruit.

When he grins, his teeth appear
like rows of jasmine flowers.

Earrings on his ears,
a ring in his nose,
a 'tilak' on his brow;
the Kostubhamani jewel around his neck
matched with three other fine necklaces.
Another golden jewel inlaid necklace
hangs by a pendant on his chest.

Within that necklace shines a white string of pearls.
On his wrist bangles,
on his long arms, armlets,
rings on his finger.

His fingernails are jewelled.

The sound of his flute
enchants the entire world
and ties the Gopis' heart
in the knot of love.

His belled waist sash
embedded with diamonds.
The lines around his lotus navel
like rows of black bees.

Sometimes he runs and skips for his 'bhaktas'
benefit.

Beloved Krishna's cheeks are beautified
with strings of sweat beads.

His gracious form is draped in a yellow cloth.
His anklets ring out with his gait.

The Holder of the Mountain resides
in Krishnadas's heart.

The brilliance of his toenails
destroys the darkness.

* * * * *

After writing that poem, Shri Nathji left. What is special about this poem is that Krishna's curly locks are covered with the dust of 'nachuki' cows. 'Nachuki' cows are those cows which have given birth for the first time and are especially attentive to their calves. For this reason they are not taken to the forest with the other cows and stay at home tending their young. In this poem, though, Krishna is surrounded by 'nachuki' cows as he herds them from the forest.

After Krishnadas had taken food, he returned and was gladdened to the poem Shri Nathji had written. Later, he approached Suradas who questioned, "Today you are very joyful. What new poem have you written?"

"Today, I have written a poem which does not resemble any of yours."

After Krishnadas sang the first line, Suradas exclaimed, "The contest is between you and me. That poem is not yours. True, I have not sung about 'nechuki' cows, but Shri Nathji came and wrote that poem. As far as a description of the Lord's body, I have sung thousands of such poems."

Hearing Suradas, Krishnadas was silenced.

A PROSTITUTE'S DELIVERANCE

Once, Krishnadas, in order to purchase supplies for the temple, went in his chariot to Agra accompanied by an ox cart. In the market there he saw a prostitute teaching her beautiful twelve year old girl how to dance. The girl's excellent dancing and singing attracted Krishnadas. He got down from his chariot and went through the crowd towards the young girl and, hearing her melodious voice, became enchanted.

Here the question arises, how did Krishnadas, who received Shri Mahaprabhu's grace, and was supposed to be protector of the moral codes of conduct, become attracted to a whore. Those who are attracted to the Lord are not enchanted by celestial nymphs or goddesses. Furthermore, Shri Mahaprabhu has compared the singing of prostitutes to gutter water and not fit for consumption. The simple answer to this apparent contradiction is that Krishnadas's relationship to the girl was divine and his desire was to have Shri Nathji accept her.

Standing there, Krishnadas considered, "She is a divine soul, and fit for Shri Nathji." He gave the prostitute ten rupees

and told her, "Come to my tent tonight." That evening, the prostitute, accompanied by her entourage, sang and danced before Krishnadas who, pleased with their performance, gave them 100 rupees and told the prostitute, "I enjoy your beauty, music, and singing. In the morning I am returning to the Govardhana Hill where my wealthy master lives. If you wish, accompany me."

Agreeing, the prostitute thought, "If he gave us this much, just imagine what his rich patron will award us."

The following morning, the prostitute, her daughter and musicians started out with Krishnadas. They passed the first night in Mathura and the following day reached the Govardhana Hill at mid-day. Krishnadas had the prostitute's daughter bathe, gave her new clothes to wear, and taught her the following poem in the 'raga' Purvi :

* * * * *

My heart is stuck upon Krishna's splendor
I'm engrossed by his handsome form
curved at three places.

From his swarthy hue complexion
the hue of a rain filled cloud
my mind does not wander.

To him, Krishnadas offers his life,
discarding worldly existence.

* * * * *

After teaching her that poem, he brought her to the temple with the rest of her group and let them perform for Shri Nathji during the afternoon 'bhog' darshan.

In the afternoon services the Lord is first awakened in the bower. Krishnadas allowed the whore to sing and

dance because at that time of day Krishna leaves the forest for His home and meets and accepts all types of 'bhaktas' that come His way.

When the 'bhog' darshan opened, the young prostitute first danced and then started to sing the song, Krishnadas had taught her. After she sang the last line, "To him Krishnadas offers his life discarding worldly existence," the young girl left her body and attained a divine form in Krishna's 'lila'. When the girl's mother and the rest of her group saw her die, they began to weep and wail, "Now, how will we make a living?"

Krishnadas then took them down to the bottom of the Govardhana Hill and consoled them, "What has happened has happened. Now what can anyone do? Tell me how much money you need."

When they requested, "One thousand rupees will sustain us for some time." Krishnadas gave them the desired sum before they departed. In this way the young prostitute was accepted by Shri Nathji through Krishnadas's mediation.

KRISHNADAS ENLIGHTENS THE VAISHNAVAS

Once a group of Vaishnavas visited Kumbhanadas and asked him to explain the Path of Grace to them. Kumbhanadas replied, "Krishnadas knows all about the Path, go ask him."

The Vaishnavas submitted, "We are unable to ask Krishnadas such a question."

Kumbhanadas consoled them, "Come with me. I will personally request him."

The reason why Kumbhanadas did not reply to the Vaishnavas' question was that he was absorbed in the most intimate 'lila' which is to be revealed only to those spiritually qualified. Kumbhanadas's poems esoterically describe the Lord's 'lila' and are not easily understood.

Because Krishnadas was able to explain to them, in a simple way, the principles of the Path, he took them there.

Arriving at his home, the Vaishnavas were warmly greeted by Krishnadas who sang the following song for them :

* * * * *

Know Krishna to consider those souls his own
whose hearts serve other 'bhaktas',
who always crave the dust of 'bhaktas' feet.

Their minds and movements are in the
Lord's 'bhaktas'.
They consider Hari and His 'bhaktas' one.

Krishnadas's speech, heart and action
are with those 'bhaktas' who have
Hari in their hearts.

* * * * *

After singing that song, Krishnadas asked, "You have blessed me by coming here. What can I do for you?"

Kumbhanadas replied, "All these Vaishnavas want to hear about the Path of Grace; what should they do, what should they remember so that they can have real experiences."

Krishnadas exclaimed, "Kumbhanadas, you have every qualification and are Shri Mahaprabhu's disciple. You are my elder, what can I say before you?"

When Kumbhanadas insisted that he tell them, Krishnadas sang :

* * * * *

Pronounce, Krishna, Shri Krishna is my refuge.

Day and night, daily, every moment, every hour
it destroys the wheel of birth and death
and removes all sins.

It creates constant love for the king of Braja,
Lord Krishna
and without any means one crosses the
fathomless worldly ocean.

Day and night the heart is filled with the bliss
of the Lord's graceful 'lila'.
It fills the soul with every essence.

Lakshmi, Brahma, Sanaka, Shuka, Sharada, Vyasa
and Narada
for a moment do not stop chanting it.
The bearer of the mountain's glory shines infinitely.

In him Krishnadas takes his shelter
while the Vedas go on repeating 'not that, not that'.

* * * * *

After singing that poem about the 'asthakshar mantra' he sang a poem about the 'panchakshar mantra':¹

* * * * *

Krishna, that Krishna,
knows the inner movements of my soul.

Consider one's body, senses, breath, wife, home,
wealth and soul as Krishna's.

Krishna is my master; I am his servant.

1. These two poems are essential commentaries on the two initiating mantras Mahaprabhu gave to his followers.

Always have within the heart that Krishna,
He is the object of one's mind,
speech and actions.

Krishnadas's Lord is the
one who held the Govardhana Hill.

Let my heart mix with the dust of
Shri Vallabh's feet.

* * * * *

After hearing two songs the Vaishnavas praised him,
* "You have removed all of our doubts and revealed to us the
principles of the path.

SHRI GUSAINJI'S SEPARATION

Krishnadas had much affection for a woman called
Gangabai.

Gangabai was born in Mathura and came to the
Govardhana Hill when she was 55. There she met
Krishnadas who requested Shri Mahaprabhu to initiate
her. Shri Mahaprabhu told him, "She is a divine soul, but
now her heart is not set on to Lord. When Krishnadas
insisted that through initiation the Lord would grace her,
Shri Mahaprabhu made her his disciple. When Krishna-
das used to leave the Govardhana Hill in order to travel
about collecting gifts for Shri Nathji, Gangabai would go
to Mathura and return to Shri Nathji's temple only when
Krishnadas did. In order to turn her mind towards the
divine 'dharma', Krishnadas sent her 'prasad', twice a day
from Shri Nathji's temple. She was fond of eating and
the preparation offered to Shri Nathji were exquisitely
prepared. Through her association with Krishnadas,
her heart turned spiritual.

Once, while Shri Gusainji was offering Shri Nathji lunch,
Gangabai happened to glance over the offering.¹ After the
morning 'seva' was completed and everyone had taken the
Lord's 'prasad', Shri Gusainji went to take some rest. At that
time, Shri Nathji awoke Ramdas, the head priest, with a stick
and told him, "I am hungry."

Ramdas, surprised, exclaimed, "But Shri Gusainji has
already offered you lunch today."

Shri Nathji complained, "Because Gangabai glanced over
the offering I did not partake of it."

Ramdas then went to Shri Gusainji and told him what
Shri Nathji had related. Shri Gusainji immediately got up,
bathed and entered into the temple. By that time all the other
cooks had come to the temple and he told them to quickly
cook some rice and 'bari', a preparation made from Mung
beans. After everything was prepared, Shri Gusainji offered
lunch as well as the Lord's supper. After putting Shri Nathji
to rest, Shri Gusainji descended down the Govardhana Hill
carrying some of the 'prasad' with him in an earthen jug. At
the bottom of the hill he gave a little to all of his disciples and
then took some himself. When Shri Gusainji began to praise
the exceptional taste Ramdas and the other people who served
in the temple agreed and said, "We have made this offering
many times, but it has never tasted so good."

Shri Gusainji enlightened them, "Because Shri Nathji was
hungry, today he lovingly partook of the offering. That is
why it tastes so delicious."

Krishnadas, who was standing nearby sarcastically men-
tioned, "Why shouldn't it taste good. After all, you made it and
now you are eating it."

1. No one who is not directly in the inner worship is supposed to see the
offering until after Krishna has enjoyed it.

Shri Gusainji replied, "We are suffering the result of your enjoyment."

Shri Gusainji made this remark because he knew that Krishnadas had allowed Gangabai to sit inside the temple. Actually, the reason Shri Nathji did not partake of the offering was that on this particular day, Shri Giridharji and his sister, Shobhabetiji, made this same 'bari' preparation in Gokul and invited Shri Nathji for lunch there. Shri Svaminiji, who had not gone to Gokul, wished to taste some of that dish. Shri Nathji, after returning from Gokul, awake Ramdas so that Shri Gusainji would make some for them.

Shri Gusainji's words stung Krishnadas's heart and he began to ponder upon a way he could keep the guru from serving in the temple. He went to Shri Purushottamji, the son of Shri Gusainji's older brother, Gopinathji, and said, "Why don't you make Shri Nathji's ornamentation? You are by birth the real head of the temple."

Purushottamji replied, "I am unable to remove Shri Gusainji from the 'seva'."

"Come with me," explained Krishnadas. "I will arrange everything."

That afternoon, before the temple opened, Purushottamji bathed and entered into the temple while Krishnadas sat down at the bottom of the Govardhana Hill. When Shri Gusainji passed by, about to walk up to the hill, Krishnadas told him, Purushottamji has bathed and entered the temple in order to perform Shri Nathji's 'seva'. You know that he is the real head of the temple. When he calls for you, you can go up to the temple. Now I will not allow you in the temple."

Shri Gusainji then bowed down to Shri Nathji's flag and recalled an incident in the Lord's 'lila'. He went to the Chandra lake where he began to experience his Lords's separation.

The entire reason for Krishnadas's removal of Shri Gusainji has its roots in the eternal 'lila', where once, Shri Gusainji, in his 'lila' form as Chandrawali, kept Krishnadas, who was in his 'lila' form as Lalita Gopi, from having Krishna's sight for six months. Now, to get even with Shri Gusainji, he prevented Shri Gusainji from having Shri Nathji's sight. Just as he had experienced in the 'lila' six months of separation from the Lord, now Shri Gusainji would have to undergo a similar six months' period.

It must be understood that Krishnadas's refusal to permit Shri Gusainji in the temple is not due to jealousy of any other mundane mood, but rather divine and totally free from Maya. The curse that Shri Gusainji and Krishnadas gave each other in the 'lila' was the impetus for Shri Gusainji's appearance on the earth whereby divine souls would be able to find Shri Nathji.

From Chandrasarovar Shri Gusainji could have Shri Nathji's sight through a window on the temple's east side. Shri Gusainji passed his entire day gazing at that window. When Krishnadas saw Shri Nathji by the window the following morning he had the window cemented over and told Shri Nathji not to look for Shri Gusainji, nor to play in his direction. Shri Gusainji daily wrote a 'sloka' for Shri Nathji and put it inside the garland he made for his blessed Lord. Every day after the midday Raj Bhog, Ramdas would go to Shri Gusainji and give him the water that had bathed Shri Nathji's feet. In return Shri Gusainji gave Ramdas the garland with the 'sloka' to Shri Nathji concealed inside it. When Shri Nathji wore the garland, he would read Shri Gusainji's 'sloka' and answer it on a betal leaf, using his chewed betal nut as ink. The following day after lunch, Ramdas would take the betal leaf to Shri Gusainji, who after reading it, ate it. For this reason the 'sloka' which Shri Nathji wrote to Shri Gusainji are known to none while Ramdas kept all the 'slokas' Shri Gusainji

wrote to Shri Nathji which later came to be known as Vijnapti.¹ Once when Shri Gusainji was suffering from intense separation he wrote to Shri Nathji :

* * * * *

Lord, without your sight
your 'bhaktas' lives are without purpose,
like a young girl
who has left her husband.

* * * * *

After Shri Nathji read Shri Gusainji's 'sloka' he wrote him a note explaining :

* * * * *

It is the nature of a cloud
to shower rain when the proper time comes.

When Krishnadas's time is up, union will ensue.
This we both know, have strength.
Why suffer such a separation.

* * * * *

After reading Shri Nathji's note Shri Gusainji wrote :

* * * * *

True, the cloud releases its rain in due time,

1. Vijnapti is one of the greatest literary works within the Path of Grace. Written in Sanskrit, it is divided into nine different sections and is rich in the mood of humility and Shri Gusainji's separation from Shri Nathji. The site at which Shri Gusainji composed this writing is still standing and is called Viprayoga Baitka, (Shri Gusainji's seat of separation.)

but know that the anguished Chataka¹ bird
still cries for its water.

* * * * *

Ramdas would daily come to Shri Gusainji and take his garlands to Shri Nathji. Once when Krishnadas reprimanded Ramdas, "I don't approve of your bringing notes back and forth from Shri Gusainji to Shri Nathji." Ramdas replied firmly, "I will continue to go daily to Shri Gusainji. You can keep me in the 'seva' or, if you wish, dismiss me."

Krishnadas was silenced by his reply, for the temple manager knew that he would not find anyone as competent as Ramdas to serve Shri Nathji.

Six months after Shri Gusainji had gone to the Chandra lake, Raja Birbal arrived in Gokul and there found out from Shri Gusainji's oldest son, Girdharji, that Shri Gusainji was residing by the Chandra lake because Krishnadas had dismissed him from Shri Nathji's 'seva'. Raja Birbal proceeded to Mathura where he ordered 500 soldiers to go to the Govardhana Hill and capture Krishnadas. Late that night, after arresting Krishnadas, Raja Birbal sent someone to Gokul to inform Shri Girdharji that Shri Gusainji should return to Shri Nathji's temple. Girdharji immediately mounted his horse and galloped to the Chandra lake where he related to his father what had happened to Krishnadas. Shri Gusainji, hearing of the arrest, was aghast and said, "Shri Mahaprabhu's blessed disciple has such hardship. I will not eat anything until Krishnadas is released."

Shri Girdharji then raced off to Mathura and told Birbal what Shri Gusainji had said. Krishnadas was released and warned by Raja Birbal, "If you ever do such a thing to Shri

1. Chatakas are amazing birds that drink only rain drops that fall for two weeks during the fall and forego all other water.

Gusainji again, I will make sure that you will never be released. Shri Girdharji then took Krishnadas to the Chandra lake. Arriving there, Shri Gusainji stood up out of respect for Krishnadas who he honored as the temple manager. Krishnadas then humbly bowed down to Shri Gusainji and, after touching his feet, sang :

* * * * *

I bow my head to those
who love the dust that has touched
the feet of Shri Vallabh's son.
What difference to me
if someone has a high post ?
Association with those who suffer the confusion
that Shri Gusainji and Krishna
are not one and the same
is poisonous venom.
Even the wise should never forget this.

Extracting the wealth from the Vedic passages
he contemplated every essence
and firmed them in his mind.
As easily as butter is drawn from milk
he made Krishna appear.

I have seen his greatness with these eyes,
but remain untouched
like flint stone covered with water stays dry.

Krishnadas, once divine, became demonical.
And now, by touching His feet, turns back
from the devil to divine.

* * * * *

After praising Shri Gusainji, Krishnadas prayed, "Forgive me for what I have done. Please perform Shri Nathji's 'seva'."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Because you are allowing me, I will go to the temple."

Shri Gusainji walked to the temple with Krishnadas and there adorned the Lord in a rose-coloured cotton garment and turban.¹ For the whole day, Shri Gusainji performed Shri Nathji's 'seva'. That evening, after waving the lights around Shri Nathji, Shri Gusainji blessed Krishnadas in front of Shri Nathji by placing a shawl over his head and telling him, "Continue to manage the temple affairs."

Krishnadas then sang :

* * * * *

The son of Vallabh is very gracious.

He blesses his own souls by placing his hand
upon their heads.

Those who take his surrender and practice
are handed over to Shri Krishna.

He is extremely generous, a wise wishing stone,
and takes us out of the worldly flow
into his association.

Krishnadas worships him and proclaims
that everything is accomplished

1. The day that Shri Gusainji returned to the temple is still celebrated today. Krishna is adorned in red because the color expresses the excitement Shri Nathji and Shri Gusainji experienced upon their reunion,

by knowing Shri Gusainji.¹

* * * * *

After singing that poem he again prayed to Shri Gusainji,
"Forgive me for the sin I have committed."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Shri Nathji will forgive you."

From then on, Shri Gusainji continued daily to perform
Shri Nathji's ornamentation and other 'sevas'.

A TRIP TO VRINDAVAN

One time, when Shri Gusainji was residing at Gokul, Krishnadas came there. After warmly greeting him, Shri Gusainji offered him the Lord's 'prashad' and a comfortable bed for the night. The following morning, when Krishnadas was preparing to leave, he mentioned to Shri Gusainji, "I wish to see Vrindavan."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Go, but there you will be troubled." Krishnadas went in his chariot to Vrindavan and arrived there at midday. When the other Vrindavan saints came out to greet Krishnadas, he suddenly came down with a fever and asked to have some water brought to him by someone who was a follower of Shri Mahaprabhu. The people there replied that they knew of only one, a low-caste sweeper from Gokul. Krishnadas told them to have that sweeper bring him some water after bathing in the Yamuna river. Hearing of Krishnadas's plight, the sweeper went to the Yamuna. There he met Shri Gusainji who was on his way to the Govardhana Hill and told him of Krishnadas's situation. Shri Gusainji galloped off to Vrindavan where he gave Krishnadas some of his own water. Krishnadas then bowed before Shri Gusainji and sang :

2. This is a very famous poem which is still sung when lineage holders bless someone's home.

* * * * *

I celebrate over Shri Gusainji's feet.
In order to uplift me, a fallen soul,
you have very mercifully journeyed here.

Your splendourous red toenails are like a fresh moon
filled with beauty and compassion.
They remove the anguish of separation.

By serving them, one receives bliss and finds
magnificence.
Your toes grant 'bhaktas' felicity.

They are soft, fragrant and cooling.
Through their touch, all distress disappears.

Says Krishnadas, upon recalling these feet,
what can this enemy, the age of struggle do ?

* * * * *

Krishnadas then submitted, "I did not follow your advice,
therefore I have had to suffer all this hardship." Both of them
returned to the Govardhana Hill where, that evening, before
Shri Nathji, Krishnadas sang :

* * * * *

Friend, this day is indeed fortunated.
My eyes are filled with the son of Nanda.

His form is generous, enchanting.
Beholding him erases my anguish.

I worship him with sandal paste.
The holder of the mountain is a young king.
His amassed beauty entangles the Gopis' hearts.

Krishnadas bows to those feet
which have the markings of a flag,

lighting bolt, ankus grass and barley.

* * * * *

KRISHNADAS FALLS IN A WELL

Some days later, a Vaishnava gave Krishnadas 300 rupees and told him, "I am returning to my native land. Please construct a well with this money."

Krishnadas put the money into a small clay cup and buried it under a mango tree in one of the gardens by the Govardhana Hill. Two hundred of the rupees were used to dig the well. Krishnadas intended to spend the last one hundred rupees to cement its sides. With this in mind, one day, in the early afternoon, after having Shri Nathji's sight, Krishnadas, cane in hand, went out to examine the well. As he was leaning to look over the edge, his cane suddenly slipped and he fell into the well. Two men went down after him with the aid of a rope but were unable to find Krishnadas's body. Some people ran to Shri Gusainji, who had just offered Shri Nathji's supper, and related, "Krishnadas fell into a well and we are unable to find his body."

Ramdas, who was sitting nearby, commented, "Those who are steeped in darkness receive such adverse consequences."

Shri Gusainji objected, "Don't say that. Krishnadas is Shri Mahaprabhu's blessed disciple. It is all part of the Lord's divine drama. He was a great manager. Where will we find a replacement to match him? The temple cannot run without a director."

Ramdas replied, "Whoever you appoint shall be the 'adhikari' (manger)."

Shri Gusainji submitted, "To correct a soul is a long, arduous task, while it takes only an instant for a soul to be

ruined. The one to whom I give the 'adhikar'¹ (qualification) to manage the temple will surely suffer a downfall."

Shri Mahaprabhu has related in his Subodhini that the Lord told the Bhagavata to Brahma the creator. He did not receive the benefit of hearing this story because of his pride of 'adhikar' (qualification) to carry out the work of creation. Later, Brahma told the Bhagavata to the celestial sage Narada but he too had pride in his 'adhikar', his ability to wander at will through any sphere of his desire. Narada in turn told Veda Vyasa the Bhagavata, but because Shri Vyasa was so impressed with his 'adhikar' of writing down all the scriptures he was unable to experience the reward of the Bhagavata. Only his son, Shri Shukadeva, and king Parikshit, who had firm renunciation and claimed no 'adhikar' were qualified to receive the divine fruit of the Bhagavata. Whoever would receive the 'adhikar' of running the temple, would inevitably become prideful and hence would not be able to experience the reward of the Path of Grace.

Later that evening, Shri Gusainji asked Shri Nathji, "Now that Krishnadas has left his body, who should I ruin by giving the 'adhikar' to manage the temple?"

Shri Nathji replied, "Whom should I destroy by giving the 'adhikar'? We should do this: The post of managing the temple should be given to whoever wants it. In this way, those who wish to fall will do so on their own accord."

The following day, after the midday 'seva' was completed, Shri Gusainji called all the Vaishnavas and Braja Vasis and told them, "He who wants to have the 'adhikar' of managing the temple, come and wear this shawl."

1. 'Adhikar' (qualification) is used here in its worldly sense. It is not a godgiven qualification but rather self-created and gives rise to false pride.

Many people had said they would be the manager but one Kshatriya took the shawl and put it over his shoulders.

KRISHNADAS'S DELIVERANCE

Once, when one of Shri Nathji's water buffalo wandered astray, Shri Gopinathji and five other cowherders, all of whom were good 'bhaktas', went off to the south end of the Govardhana Hill to search for the beast. There, they saw Shri Nathji playing with his friends under a Pepul tree, while Krishnadas, who had turned into a ghost, was sitting on top of the tree. Krishnadas called out to Gopinathji, "Glories to Krishna. Please relay this message to Shri Gusainji that because I have committed a sin against him, I have fallen to this position. Only through his grace am I still able to have Shri Nathji's sight. Only his mercy will liberate me. Also, tell him, by the Bichhu lake, under a mango tree, there is a clay jug with a hundred rupees. Use that money to finish the well. Also, Shri Nathji's buffalo went off in the thicket over there."

After Gopinathji found the buffalo in the spot Krishnadas had said, they all returned to the cowshed.

Later that evening Gopinathji went before Shri Gusainji and told him of his meeting with Krishnadas and how he had prayed for Shri Gusainji's grace to free him from his ghost form. Shri Gusainji considered, "Krishnadas is suffering greatly. I must free him from being a ghost."

Shri Gusainji then recovered the one hundred rupees and told the new temple manager to finish the well. That night Shri Gusainji proceeded to Mathura where he completed Krishnadas's last rites on the Dhruva Ghat by the banks of the Yamuna river. Only then did Krishnadas drop his ghost form, and, receiving a divine form, enter into Shri Krishna's eternal 'lila'.

Why did Shri Gusainji have to go to Mathura in order to perform Krishnadas's last rites, when he could have

released him from his ghost form simply through his grace ?

Because of the difficulties of this age of struggle, Shri Gusainji was not in a position to reveal his greatness. Thus, he had to appear as if he were liberating Krishnadas by performing his last rites. In this way, the Dhruva Ghat in Mathura became famous for performing the last rites of deceased persons.

In the Bhagavata it is related that through Prahladaji, who was a 'bhakta' who followed the Path of Law, twenty-one generations in his family were liberated. It is not surprising then that Krishnadas, a 'bhakta' who followed the Path of Grace, liberated his entire lineage as well as countless other people.

The story of Krishnadas is in every way transcendental. Shri Gusainji praised Krishnadas, "His poems about the 'rasa lila' dance are unequalled. There will never be another temple manager like Krishnadas."

Shri Nathji remains eternally pleased with Krishnadas.

CHATRABHUJADAS

Chatrabhujadas's form in Krishna's 'lila's is Vimal as a Gopi and Vishal Sakha as Krishna's friend.

A WISH FOR A BHAKTA SON

Chatrabhujadas was born in Yamunavata and was Kumbhanadas's sixth son.¹ Before his birth, Kumbhanadas was distressed that all of his sons were attached to worldly ways and regretted, "I don't have a single son to whom I can relate."

Kumbhanadas had one neice who was a good 'bhakta'. After her husband died, she lived with Kumbhanadas. Some time passed before Kumbhanadas had another son, Krishnadas. He tended Shri Nathji's cows but was unable to sing. How he was devoured by a tiger while saving one of Shri Nathji's cows has already been related in Kumbhanadas's 'varta'.

Kumbhanadas cherished the desire within his heart to have a son who could freely talk with him about his Lord. One day, Shri Nathji asked Kumbhanadas, "Why are you so sad?"

"Maharaj," Kumbhanadas replied, "I don't have any 'satsang' (good association)."

1. Chatrabhujadas was born in 1540 A.D. in the Kshatriya caste.

Shri Nathji laughed, "Kumbhanadas, I am the fruit of all 'satsang' and chase after you. Yet you desire good association."¹

Kumbhanadas submitted, "Without¹ intercourse with great 'bhaktas', how is it possible to know Your blissful nature? Only 'bhaktas' fathom you."

"Kumbhanadas," Shri Nathji exclaimed, "You are blessed. I will grant you a great 'bhakta' with whom you can speak freely. You will have an enlightened son."

From that day, Kumbhanadas anxiously wondered when that son would be born and what type of sentiments he would cherish for Krishna. Meanwhile, Kumbhanadas's wife became pregnant.

One day, while Kumbhanadas was playing with Shri Nathji, they went to steal some curds and butter from a dairy maid's house. While the Lord had His hands on a jug of curds, His shawl fell to the ground. Suddenly, two other arms appeared from His body which he used to pick up the cloth and Kumbhanadas beheld Krishna's chatrabhuj, four-armed, form. While Krishna and His friends were feasting on the milk products, the dairy maid suddenly returned and chased after Krishna, the butter thief. When she approached the young Lord, He spit a mouthful of milk in her face, and everyone managed to slip away. Krishna returned to the temple, while Kumbhanadas returned home, remembering Krishna's four-armed form and the funny incident. He sang:

* * * * *

She caught the good Hari

1. To wish for a moment's association with a real 'bhakta' is a desire of the highest nature. Enlightened association is the most auspicious devotional practice.

stealing curds and eating butter,
something Krishna does daily.

The pretty Braja maiden
blocked the door;
the sound of her anklet bells startled Him.

(Krishna considers)
"How can I get out of this jam?"
and smashed her pots
of milk and curds.
Kumbhanadas's Lord is trapped.

Her loving heart
won't let him go home.

The Mountain Holder, fills his mouth with milk,
spits into her eyes,
and scrambles away.¹

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Kumbhanadas's wife gave birth to a son and Kumbhanadas decided to call him Chatrabhujadas, the servant of the four-armed Lord.²

1. How fortunate that Braja maiden was to receive so directly the nectar of Krishna's 'prashad'. In sports like these Krishna showered His grace upon the residents of Braja by acting like a mischievous child. This would be troublesome if He was simply naughty kid, but is blissful because He is the Supreme Identity.
2. Some people feel that Krishna's four-armed form contains two of His own arms and two of His consorts. Also, His four arms represent the four Gopis Shri Svaminiji, Shri Yamunaji, Kumarika, and Shri Chandravali. Shri Mathureshji, Shri Kalayanrayaji, Shri Dwarkanathji, and Shri Gokulnathji are the four main four-armed Krishna 'svarupas' worshipped in the Path of Grace.

That afternoon, Kumbhanadas visited Shri Gusainji who smiled and said, "Kumbhanadas, how are you?"

"Those upon whom you shower your grace are always well and forever liberated," submitted Kumbhanadas.

Shri Gusainji blessed him, "That newborn son of yours is going to give you great happiness."

Later, Kumbhanadas brought the infant to the guru for initiation before Shri Nathji. After receiving the sacred mantra, the infant, Chatrabhujadas, began to experience all of Krishna's 'lilas' and sang :

* * * * *

Shri Gusainji's disciples
have heaps of pleasure.

To see the sports of God's manifestation
fills my heart with felicity.

My guru's outlook is enlightened,
his teaching in accordance
with the divine play.

Only a fool who has forgotten how to think
would forsake him to chase after knowledge.
He tells Krishna to take strong hold of our arms.

Chatrabhujadas's Lord uplifts the fallen.
Shri Gusainji's grace is all encompassing.

* * * * *

Hearing that poem, Kumbhanadas happily considered, "My wish to have association with a 'bhakta' has been fulfilled."

After the temple was closed, Kumbhanadas took his son down to Shri Gusainji's home. At that time, Chatrabhujadas appeared like a normal infant. When all the other disciples left, Shri Gusainji took his meals and the remains were given to Kumbhanadas and his son. Then, they headed home towards Yamunavata. In their house, when they were all alone, Chatrabhujadas began to talk of Shri Nathji's 'lila', of Shri Mahaprabhu and of Shri Gusainji. If anyone would enter the room, Chatrabhujadas would act like an innocent infant. From that day, Chatrabhujadas would not even drink his milk until he had Shri Nathji's sight.

CHATRABHUJADAS JOINS SHRI NANTHJI

One day, Shri Nathji said, "Chatrabhujadas, today join me when I graze the cows."

After the morning 'seva' was completed, Chatrabhujadas went and sat by the Govinda lake, while Kumbhanadas asked everyone in the temple, "Where is Chatrabhujadas?"

Later, when the father went to pay his respects to Shri Gusainji, the guru questioned, "Why do you look so worried?"

"Maharaja," Kumbhanadas replied. "Chatrabhujadas was just in the temple and now I can't find him. Where has he gone?"

"From today onwards you should never worry about Chatrabhujadas. Shri Nathji invited your son to accompany Him to herd the cows in the forest. He is in the forest with Krishna, Balaram and their friends. In about twenty minutes they will reach the grove of Kamdam trees. If you want, meet them there," the guru revealed.

Hearing that, Kumbhanadas headed for the spot where he saw Krishna and all His friends sitting in a glade, the cows grazing around them. When Kumbhanadas bowed before Shri Nathji, the Lord said, "Kumbhanadas, come and sit."

Kumbhanadas elated, "Now you have showered Your grace upon my son, Chatrabhujadas. It is his great fortune."

DAIRY THIEVERY

One day, Shri Nathji went to a dairy maid's house to steal her milk, curds and butter. He advised Chatrabhujadas, "You go into her house."

Meanwhile, Shri Nathji devoured her dairy products when all of a sudden the dairy maid's daughter saw Chatrabhujadas and called her parents. "Kumbhanadas's son is eating all our milk, curds and butte."

Hearing her call, a bunch of men rushed to the scene while Krishna and His friends dashed away, for they were accomplished in dairy thievery while the inexperienced Chatrabhujadas simply stood there. It was the first time he had ever done such a thing. The Braja Vasis grabbed Chatrabhujadas and after spanking him said, "If we ever catch you stealing again, we will bring your father here," and let the child go.

Later, when Chatrabhujadas caught up with Shri Nathji and His gang, everyone laughed at Chatrabhujadas while he complained, "You all take the butter and curds while I have to take their beatings."

"Why didn't you eat anything?" Shri Nathji questioned. "Why didn't you flee with the rest of us?"

KUMBHANADAS'S POEM

One night, while Kumbhanadas and Chatrabhujadas were sitting together at home, they saw in the distance the

1. Shri Krishna's episodes of stealing dairy products from the Gopis have earned Him the title, "Makhan Chor", the Butter Thief. These acts of thievery were not undertaken to deprive the Gopis of any of their dairy goods, but rather to bestow upon them His blissful presence. Krishna had thousands of cows of His own,

lights shimmering in Shri Nathji's temple. Kumbhanadas then sang :

* * * * *

Look at the light in the window.
There Hari rests
in the lofty room
filled with love paintings.

* * * * *

Chatrabhujadas then added :

* * * * *

Beloved Krishna makes great efforts
to behold her fair face.

* * * * *

Pleased, Kumbhanadas asked, "Have you also experienced that 'lila'?"

"Through the guru's grace," Chatrabhujadas submitted
"Shri Nathji revealed this pastime to me."

Kumbhanadas then completed the poem :

* * * * *

Look at the light in the window.

There Hari rests
in a lofty room filled with love paintings.
Beloved Krishna makes great efforts
to behold her fair face.

He puts his arms around her neck,
thrills her with the nectar of His lips.

Her mind and heart merged
with the love of her life.

Her fresh form, beautiful
filled with great splendor.

Says Kumbhanadas,
"Krishna's fortune has climaxed.

The couple join into one essence,
the new, lovely and wise Radha
with the young lad
who held the mountain."

* * * * *

After singing that song, Kumbhanadas said, "Shri Nathji
conceals nothing from you."

Both Kumbhanadas and Chatrabhujadas were Krishna's
best friends. They had received His grace and were great
'bhaktas'.

MAHAPRABHU'S BIRTHDAY

Once, on the occasion of Shri Mahaprabhu's birthday,
Shri Gusainji made special offerings and ornamentation like the
ones offered on Krishna's appearance day. Upon seeing Shri
Nathji's ornamentation, Chatrabhujadas sang :

* * * * *

Spying Krishna's elaborate ornamentation
she takes mirror in hand
to show her beloved saying,
"At one glimpse of you I rejoice.

Today your splendor is beyond words.

On each part of your body
exquisite clothes and jewels.
Resplendent, you enchant my mind."

The Braja maiden thrills in every pore
and makes a fragrant flower garland.

She waves her shawl around her love
in celebration.

The wishes of her mind and body bounding.
Chatrabhujadas drinks the nectar of Krishna's form.

* * * * *

After the norming 'seva' was completed, Shri Gusainji
retired to the Govinda lake with Chatrabhujadas and another
Vaishnava who asked the guru, "Today you showed Shri
Nathji the mirror like you do any other day. Why then did
Chatrabhujadas sing, "Today your splendor is beyond words"?

"Ask Chatrabhujadas," the guru replied. In response,
the poet began to sing another song :

* * * * *

Friend, today, tomorrow, yes, every day,
behold the nectar-filled Holder of the Mountain.

What poet can possibly illustrate
his clothes and ornaments ?

Every moment his beauty is fresh again,
his every part, an ocean of graciousness,
more spell-binding than a billion love gods.

His beauty upsurges waves
and captures the heart of the world.

Chatrabhujadas imbibes Shri Nathji's sweet form
and lives forever in his shelter.

* * * * *

Hearing that poem, the Vaishnava's doubts were even greater. He questioned, "I don't understand either of your poems."

Later that day, the Vaishnava again inquired of Shri Gusainji, "Still, I was not able to understand Chatrabhujadas's poems today. Please remove my confusion."

Shri Gusainji explained, "Today, Shri Mahaprabhu's appearance day, Shri Svaminiji prepared all the offerings and ornamentation with her own hands, thus pleasing Shri Nathji. So, Chatrabhujadas sang, "Today your splendor is beyond words." The second poem he sang by the Govinda lake explains how the women of Braja continually offer foodstuffs and ornaments to Krishna who lovingly accepts them and fulfills their desires. So, "Shri Nathji is splendorous every moment".

The Vaishnava considered, "Chatrabhujadas's fortune is great. Krishna allows him the sight of His blissful 'lila'."

THE RASA PLAY

Once, a man who headed a 'rasa' dance group came to

the Govardhana Hill.¹ At that time Shri Gusainji was in Gokul. The man approached Shri Gokulnathji, Shri Gusainji's fourth son, and requested him to watch his performance. Shri Gokulnathji replied that he must ask the permission of his eldest brother, Shri Girdharji, who later told him, "Do as you please. 'Don't leave the decision up to me, but I will not join you."

Gokulnathji took Chatrabhujadas with him to see the 'rasa lila' performance. It was the auspicious full moon autumn evening of the celebrated 'rasa lila' when, as the Bhagavata relates, Krishna dances with the Gopis. After the 'rasa mandalis' company had performed for almost the entire night, Shri Gokulnathji told Chatrabhujadas, "Sing something."

"When I see Shri Nathji actually making 'rasa', I will begin to sing. Now, the Lord is with your eldest brother, Girdharji."

1. Rasa is a traditional circular Indian dance. Shri Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya has described the esoteric meaning of 'rasa' as a congregation of divine moods. In the 'rasa lila' described in the Shrimad Bhagavatam, the Gopis received the fruit of union with Lord Krishna. The chapters which deal with the 'rasa' dance are given the highest respect by the great Vaishnava Acharyas and saints.

'Rasa mandalis' are travelling dance and theatre troupes which enact not only the 'rasa' but also many other Krishna 'lilas'. They are comprised of Brahmin Braja Vasi boys who have not reached puberty. At that early age they are taught to dance and sing in these classical Indian 'ragas' and enact the different Krishna 'lilas'. One of these first 'rasa mandalis' companies was so engrossed in the spirit of Krishna's 'lila', that during the performance, the boy who was playing Krishna merged in to the 'lila', never to return to this world. When these young boys put on the dress of Krishna and the Gopis of Braja they are considered to be divine and are worshipped as if they are in fact the Lord and the Braja dairy maids. To this day there are many 'rasa' mandalis' groups in the Vrindavan area which journey all over India.

Gokulnathji exclaimed, "What can I do? By the time I go and call Girdharji, it will be morning and too late."

"Don't worry," consoled Chatrabhujadas, "Your brother is on his way with Shri Nathji."

Shri Nathji then told Girdharji while he was sleeping, "Let us join Shri Gokulnath. There, I can make some 'rasa'." When Girdharji arrived where Shri Gokulnathji and his other brothers were, at that moment, they all had the sight of Shri Nathji making 'rasa lila' with the Gopis of Braja. The night became illuminated and Chatrabhujadas began to sing :

* * * * *

In amazing dancing garb
the beautiful Shyam, a bonanza of qualities,
performs the 'rasa'.

Encountered by groups of Gopis
on the Yamuna banks
He sings the Kedaro melody;
then flute to lips, sounds clearly
a scale of seven notes.

In mixed meters
steps resound
tatatatatathei,
indiscernable, such intricate beats.

The gods above are all aghast
to see the forest play
of Chatrabhujadas's Lord,

Spying the dalliance, the moon languished
on its westward journey.¹

* * * * *

After singing that, Shri Nathji called out to Chatrabhujadas, "What time is it?"

Chatrabhujadas then sang :

* * * * *

Dexterous Krishna dances
with his arm around his love's neck.
Together they rejoice
and prance in proper step.

Radha, endowed with the talents of 'rasa',
Krishna, a mansion of skill.
His melodious flute yields such sweet sound.

Absorbed in the spirit of 'rasa',
they sing in measured time.

To see the dance of Chatrabhujadas's Lord,
Radha and Krishna,
enraptures even birds and forest deer,
stops celestial cars in their tracks.

* * * * *

1. During the actual 'rasa' dance, which took place during the course of a single night, the movement of the moon and the stars decelerated in order to lengthen that one night to six months, thus allowing ample time for the dance to be completed.

Shri Nathji was pleased to hear his poems and smiled at the poet. Chatrabhujadas then thought, "My fortune is truly great."

After much singing and dancing, Shri Nathji returned home. Gokulnathji gave the leader of the 'rasa manadalis' group a generous reward and he too proceeded home.

Some days later, Shri Gusainji returned from Shri Gokul and upon hearing from Shri Girdharji about the 'rasa' festivals, replied, "We should not force Shri Nathji. He was strained. Krishna make 'rasa' every night according to His own wish."

THE DIVINE COUPLE IN A CAVE

One day, Shri Gusainji told Chatrabhujadas, "Go to the Apsara lake and tell Ramdas to gather some flowers before returning here."

Chatrabhujadas proceeded to the Apsara lake and, after relating to Ramdas the guru's biddings, started to pick flowers. He wandered by a cave on the Govardhana Hill wherein he saw Shri Nathji with His consort and began singing their praises :

* * * * *

The beloved and his love
have spent the night
in a deep cave within the Govardhana Hill.
They arise and leave in the morning.

The son of Nanda and the darling of Brishabhan
are drenched in the color of love.

The garland on her chest is sodden, withered;
ornaments placed out of sorts;
her 'sari' soaked with the nectar of devotion.

His turban bears the stain of her lips
and drops lopsided.
All around them great splendor flourishes.

Wandering about, victorious in the battle of love
is the king of elephants, Giridhar,
with his she-elephant consort.¹

Seeing the pleasure of the couple
Chatrabhujadas offers to them
his body, mind and wealth.

* * * * *

Hearing that song, Shri Nathji requested, "Sing something else."

The poet began :

* * * * *

The queen of the village glade
rules the night.

The Love God, the king of elephants,
victorious in the great battle,
now sweats and yawns.

She is brilliant like the sun,
her eyebrows angular as bows,
her eyes the aimed arrows.

Chatrabhujadas's Lord Krishna
a tycoon of mood
dallies as he wishes.

* * * * *

1. The elephant is considered to be of all animals, most adept in love sports.

After singing those two poems, the poet bowed to Shri Nathji and renewed his flower gathering. Soon, he returned to Shri Gusainji who questioned, "Where have you been all this time?"

Shri Gusainji was pleased to hear about Chatrabhujadas's adventure and blessed him "When Shri Nathji's ornamentation is being made, you daily come and see."¹

CHATRABHUJADAS'S WIFE

Once, Shri Nathji told Chatrabhujadas, "Get married."

"Why should I leave this joy and undertake such a bother?" Chatrabhujadas objected, but the Lord replied, "Quickly, get married."

Chatrabhujadas did as he was told, but after some time, his wife died. For Fourteen days, during his period of mourning, Chatrabhujadas was not allowed in the temple. Chatrabhujadas, afflicted with such feelings of separation from his Lord, sat in the forest and sang the following songs :

* * * * *

In the morning,
I love to see Krishna's lovely cheeks
and tremulous handsome eyes.
Gazing, my eyes win fruition.

From head to toe,
is His unequalled form
more splendid than countless Loves.

1. This is a great honor Shri Gusainji allowed the poet for outsiders are never allowed to see Shri Nathji being adorned. From this incident, Shri Gusainji came to know of Chatrabhujadas's intimacy with Shri Krishna.

Chatrabhujadas's Lord, the Mountain Holder,
relishes moods of 'rasa'.
To glimpse at him is my great fortune.

* * * * *

She cannot be a moment separated
from the beautiful Shyam,
the love of her life.

When his eyes are concealed
she quivers like a fish out of water.
He is the center of her eye.

His sweet smile, sidelong glances, rhythmic gait
are naturally pleasing.

Next to the grace of Chatrabhujadas's Lord Krishna
a billion love gods pale.

* * * * *

My heart contemplates Krishna's lotus face.

Not billion suns,
not, billion moons
nor even a billion cupids
can compare to him.

His comely breast fills my eyes with elixir.
He's an ocean of pleasure, ineffable.

All dharma, wealth, desire and emancipation
lie in the hands
of Chatrabhujadas's Lord,
the God of Gokul,
the Holder of the Mountain.

* * * * *

In this way for fourteen days after his wife died, Chatrabhujadas passed his time waiting for the moment he could enter Shri Nathji's temple. When he was finally able to have Shri Nathji's sight, the Lord told the poet, "Remarry."

"There are no other unmarried woman in my caste," objected Chatrabhujadas.

"Then look for one," Shri Nathji ordered.

For five or six days, Shri Nathji reminded Chatrabhujadas to seek a second wife, but the poet did nothing about it. "Find a bride for Chatrabhujadas," Shri Nathji then told Sadu Pande who later reprimanded the poet, "You should obey the Lord's orders,"

Chatrabhujadas reluctantly thought, "What can I do? He keeps chasing me."

Sadu Pande finally arranged Chatrabhujadas's second marriage with a widowed girl. From that day, Shri Nathji used to tease him, "His wife died and he could not wait more than a few months before he found himself another," until one day, Chatrabhujadas told Shri Nathji, "You chide me daily, but you pursue the Braja women from house to house."

Hearing Chatrabhujadas's words, Shri Nathji was abashed and remained silent. Later, the Lord told Shri Gusainji what Chatrabhujadas had said and requested, "Tell him never to talk like that with me again."

When Chatrabhujadas came to the temple, Shri Gusainji reprimanded him, "Why did you speak to Shri Nathji in such a fashion?"

"He daily upbraids me," Chatrabhujadas defended, "So one time I told Him off."

Shri Gusainji rebuked him, "Don't ever talk to Him like that again."

From then onwards, even if Shri Nathji teased the poet, he would say nothing. Lord Krishna showered His grace over Chatrabhujadas and gave him the direct experience of His presence.

SHRI NATHJI VISITS MATHURA

One spring when Shri Gusainji was travelling outside the Braja area, Shri Girdharji and all of his brothers and sisters took Shri Nathji from the Govardhana Hill to Mathura, fifteen miles away, where they offered Him everything they owned.

One of Shri Gusainji's daughters hid a gold toe ring which she did not want to offer, but Shri Nathji, knowing of it, told Shri Girdharji, "One of your children has hidden one of my toe rings."

He then approached her and she relinquished the cherished ornament. All of the ladies in the household were very pleased and considered themselves lucky that Shri Nathji requested their things.

When Shri Nathji went to Mathura, Chatrabhujadas was in Yamunavata and unaware of His Lord's departure. That afternoon, when Chatrabhujadas went to Shri Nathji's temple, and did not find Him, he asked the door guard, "Where is Shri Nathji?"

The man replied, "Shri Nathji have gone to Mathura."

Hearing those words, Chatrabhujadas experienced great separation from his Lord and sat on top of the hill singing :

* * * * *

To whom can I tell
the story of my attachment.

Listen friend, to the condition of this body.

I silently reflect
and keep the pain in my heart.
Besides the patient, who can know the pain?
I must endure the scorn of the world.

Says Chatrabhujadas, "When I meet Giridhar
I will take every pleasure."

* * * * *

To encounter the enchanting Krishna,
to see his face, makes me forget this body.
Friend, how to return home?

What are parents or brothers
or a husband's love for his maiden?

Why have worldly shame
or fear of the clan?

I wander alone through the forest.
He is the main mantra.
With Him I meet and play.

In Chatrabhujadas's Lord Krishna
so much nectar has amassed
to break the Vedic laws.

* * * * *

The day before Shri Nathji was to return, Chatrabhujadas
went atop the Govardhana Hill in the afternoon and when he
did not see Shri Nathji, he again experienced intense separation
and sang:

* * * * *

Without you, Krishna,
lovely dweller of Govardhana,
I cannot exist.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Show your lovely face
with sidelong glances and a smile.

My eyes flutter like a fish out of water
a wink passes as an age.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, Mohan, play your flute
in patterns of seven notes.

For just a moment sing sweet and honeyed tunes,
enchanting, pleasing.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, delectable one
who appreciates sublime mood,
speak, climb the Govardhana Hill,
call your cows by name,
Ganga, Dhumari.
Loudly, for a moment,
sound your call.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, since gazing upon you
I relish nothing else.

At night, sleepless,
I've forgotten food and drink.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, my eyes burn for your sight,
my ears for your speech.

My heart thorbs to join with you
the elan of my soul.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, my heart cherishes these desires,
my eyes shut not a wink
that I might see you come, Love,
dresses as an agile dancer.

These eyes are steady aimed,
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, you have pinched my mind
as I behold your face like a full moon.

Krishna, to imbibe the nectar of your body
I am the moon-bird
in a sea of night lotuses.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, I have forsaken discretion,
I disregard my clan,
the scorn and restrictions of this world.
Krishna, like a lotus petal
that blossoms with the sun,
moment to moment my love flourishes.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, gorgeous like a billion love gods.
I love to see your attractive gait,
your gracious lotus eyes.
Krishna, the one who captures women's hearts.

Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Beloved Krishna, I repeat this
like a 'chataka' bird keeps crying for its cloud
Krishna, darling, my rain-filled cloud,
burst with your love.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, bonanza of bliss, Madan Gopal
I am the Vrindavan Malti flower
and you are the black bee who enjoys.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

Krishna, in every age,
you steadfast reside in the bliss abode.

Over Shri Nathji's splendor
Chatrabhujadas celebrates.
Beloved darling of the king of Braja.

* * * * *

After singing that poem, Chatrabhujadas suddenly heard the jingling bells of the cows and then saw Krishna and his older brother, Balaram, surrounded by their comrades. The poet drew near to the Lord and upon paying his respects asked "When will you give me Your sight atop this hill?"

"Tomorrow," replied Shri Krishna and then disappeared. For that entire night, Chatrabhujadas sang poems of separation. Meanwhile, early that evening, Shri Nathji told Shri Girdharji, "Tomorrow, take me back to the Govardhana Hill. Shri Gusainji is returning tomorrow; don't delay."

That evening, all the preparations were made for Shri Nathji's departure and, the following morning, Shri Nathji followed by Girdharji and his entire family, headed home. Chatrabhujadas, sitting on top of the hill, awaited Shri Nathji's arrival singing :

* * * * *

Since then, a moment has passed like an age.
Friend, the day Mohan turned and smiled at me
he cast a charm.
Now I cherish nothing else.

My hours somehow slowly pass.
Now I'm crushed with dread.
My heart enfolds Krishna's form,
my soul suspended on his swarthy form.

To meet Mountain Holder
Chatrabhujadas's eyes are very frantic.

* * * * *

After completing that poem, Chatrabhujadas saw Shri Nathji approaching in the distance. It was mid-day by the time Shri Nathji arrived at the temple. The food was prepared and offered when Shri Gusainji returned from his trip to Gujarat and questioned his sons, "Why are the offerings so late today?"

Shri Gokulnathji explained, "We took Shri Nathji to Mathura and have just returned this day."

Pleased that his son could read his heart, for Shri Gusainji would not have been able to bear the sight of the temple devoid of Shri Nathji, entered the temple and performed Shri Nathji's 'seva'. That day was the celebration of Narsingh's appearance day and lunch and supper were offered together. Chatrabhujadas was elated to see Shri Nathji. Later, when the poet paid his respects to the guru, Shri Gusainji said, "Shri Nathji is very kind. He cannot bear the distress of His 'bhaktas'."

CHATRABHUJADAS GOES TO GOKUL

Once, Shri Gokulnathji asked his father, "If it is alright with you, I wish to take Chatrabhujadas to Gokul. He has

never seen the sacred town and it is only fourteen miles from the Govardhana Hill."

His father replied, "If he'll go, take him."

Shri Gokulnathji invited the poet to join him on his trip to Gokul and he agreed. When they arrived at Shri Navanita Priyaji's¹ house of worship, Shri Gusainji had also arrived there. Seeing the infant 'svarupa' of Krishna, Chatrabhujadas began to sing about Krishna's appearance festivities.

* * * * *

A great festival engulfs Gokul.

Transported in love
the Gopis exalt Him, the beautiful Shyam,
and repeat his name.

Everywhere is sung
the praises of his 'lila'.
The cowpen and by-lanes abound with curds.

Time passes mirthfully,
day and night in spectacular affiars.

The enchanting form of the son of Nanda,
the one who pleases all
fulfils every wish.

Says Chatrabhujadas,
Giridhar is a host of cheer.
From head to toe, delightful beauty.²

* * * * *

1. Shri Navanita Priyaji is one of Krishna's forms as an infant. He holds butter in His hand.
2. It is interesting to note here that this is the first song Chatrabhujadas has sung about infant Krishna. All of his other poems dealt with Shri Nathji, the form of Krishna as an adolescent. Now coming to Gokul he was suddenly initiated into the joy of Krishna's birthday celebrations.

Letting go of his thumb
 infant Krishna staggers along.
 His anklet bells jangle when his feet
 strike the ground.
 Sometimes he holds onto the floor,
 laughs and totters backward.
 His mother, joyous of heart to see her child,
 caresses him,
 her lucky, lovely Krishna.
 Speaking honeyed child gibberish,
 he asks for butter
 and eats like a baby bird.
 Observes Chatrabhujadas,
 Nanda stands and spies,
 transfixed, blissed out by his son's infant frolic.¹

* * * * *

1. Chatrabhujadas sang these poem about Krishna's infant play with sincerity but his heart was fastened to Krishna's intimate pastimes with the Gopis. Generally speaking, when a 'bhakta' receives divine grace, he or she adores Krishna primarily in a single mood, whether it be as a servant, parent, lover, or friend. Attachment to only one form of Krishna is an indication of devotion, although, philosophically speaking, all His forms are equal. The following story indicates this. It is the custom for all of Vallabhacharya's lineage holders to go to Nathdwara at least once in their lives to serve Shri Nathji. One lineage holder was so immersed in serving his Krishna 'svarupa', Chandramaji, that he never managed to reach Nathdwara, the home of Shri Nathji. The other lineage holders approached him and reminded him of his duty. Finally, he agreed to pilgrimage to see Shri Nathji for a single day. Travelling all night, he arrived at Nathdwara in the morning. After he finished Shri Nathji's ornamentation, he went to offer the Lord His flute at his mouth as if He were Chandramaji, for he thought that he was serving his own Krishna 'svarupa'. But Shri Nathji accepts the flute in his right hand by his hip. When there wasn't a hand to accept the flute, the esteemed lineage holder was in anguish and felt that his Lord was not pleased with him that day. Unable to bear his distress, Shri Nathji generated two arms in the same position as those of Chandramaji and took the offered flute. 'Bhaktas' worship God in the form that most attracts them. Their pure affection and love, as if a chisel, carves the form of the Lord they desire in their spiritual hearts.

Shri Gusainji pleased by his poem said, "Ask whatever you want."

"You know my heart," replied Chatrabhujadas. Allow me Shri Nathji's sight."

Shri Gusainji promised "Tomorrow, after ornamentation, we will return together."

The following morning, Chatrabhujadas sang in the mood of Krishna's mother, Yashoda :

* * * * *

I rejoice over you,
 infant Krishna, who loves butter.

Daily, these milk maids rise and approach,
 complaining of your dairy thefts,
 You and your brother, Balaram,
 romp together in the courtyard.
 My gazing eyes find total contentment in you,
 my life's wealth, dark Krishna.

Enchanter, whatever you desire, take;
 dried fruit, yogurt, cow's milk.
 Giridhar, why do you go to other homes
 when whatever you want
 is so plentiful here ?

* * * * *

"Daily they come complaining
 those intoxicated youthful dairy maids.

These pots of which they speak
 are in their own homes;

How could my Krishna even find them.
My son is so very gentle
as he takes the hand of Balaram to play.

Sometimes those Gopis complain,
"He tore my blouse,"
and then accuse him of some other crime;
he takes mustard seeds from their jugs
and dances in their yard."

If the mind is stuck to the
lotus-petalled eyed Krishna,
so many things can be claimed.

Says Chatrabhujadas, "Making up these excuses
let them see Krishna every moment."

* * * * *

Later, when Shri Gusainji was swinging infant Krishna in
a cradle, Chatrabhujadas sang :

* * * * *

Queen Yashoda, swings her child Gopal,
in a cradle.

Over and over she peers at his lotus face;
enthralled, she sings to Him
with curly locks and a black dot on his forehead
auspicious songs.

Yashoda adorns her son with a necklace.

He enthusiastically savors butter mixed with sugar
and licks it off his fingers.

Sometimes he plays with a toy peacock,
sometimes other playthings.

He peeks at them, grins,
and reveals his milky teeth.

Like an ocean of night lilies or a moon bird
drinks the moon's ambrosia.

Yashoda picks up Chatrabhujadas's Lord,
moon-like Krishna, laughs, and hugs him.

* * * * *

Govinda swings in the cradle.

"For you, my source of bliss,
I have churned the curds to butter."

On his necklace hangs a splendid locket.
His brow ensnares the heart.

Every moment she beholds his beauty,
rocks him, and sings of his 'lila'.

When that mansion of bliss laughs slightly
his milky teeth emerge.

Says Chatrabhujadas,
"Over Krishna, the moon of Gokul,
Yashoda celebrates.

* * * * *

Afterwards, Shri Gusainji set out with Chatrabhujadas
for Shri Nathji's temple and arrived there in time for the sight
of Shri Nathji's mid-day sight when Chatrabhujadas sang :

* * * * *

Nothing have I enjoyed
since I saw the beautiful Shyam
milking the cows in the pen.

Friend, I was on the path minding my own way
when I saw him, Madan Gopal.

I was stunned and charmed,
heedless of shame,
home, clan, oathes,
friends, and parents.

Says Chatrabhujadas, Krishna has robbed
me of my mind and body.

* * * * *

Chatrabhujadas elated, "Today I am infinitely fortunated to
have had Shri Krishna's sight."

Upon leaving the temple, Kumbhanadas asked, "Where
have you been ?

His son replied, "Shri Gokulnathji took me to Gokul and
I returned with Shri Gusainji."

Kumbhanadas replied, "You have fallen from grace to
law."

Shri Gusainji, overhearing the remark, laughed and
entered the temple. When the 'seva' was completed, Chatra-
bhujadas asked his guru, "Why does my father consider Gokul
to be under the influence of law ?"

"Kumbhanadas's heart is stuck to Shri Nathji and is not
separated from Him even for a moment. For this reason, he
views all other Krishna 'lilas' as restricted by law. Actually,
Krishna's infant and adolescent 'lilas' are one," the guru
replied.

From that day, Chatrabhujadas never left the Govardhana
Hill.

CHATRABHUJADAS'S DIVINE DEPARTURE

After a while, Shri Gusainji entered into a cave on the

Govardhana Hill and left his shawl with his eldest son, Shri
Girdharji, saying, "Keep Shri Nathji happy. Do what He says.
Take care of your brothers and all the Vaishnavas. Complete
my last rites with this shawl. Don't worry, Shri Nathji will
accomplish everything."

Shri Gusainji then walked inside the cave and bodily
entered Krishna's eternal 'lila'.

After Shri Gusainji left this world, his sons and disciples
experienced the great grief of his separation. Meanwhile,
Chatrabhujadas was at home in Yamunavata. When he heard
the news, he ran to the cave and fell down to the ground crying,
"You didn't give me your sight before you left. Now, how
can I remain without you. Call me near to your lotus feet."

And he sang :

* * * * *

Be merciful, give me your sight
in that 'lila'
in that dress
with the cows and cowlads
entering the village of Gokul.
Like King Nanda,
generous, free with his fortune.

Make 'bhakti' appear
and teach the people in this age of struggl

Do the 'rasa' dance
in the land of the Govardhna Hill.

My eyes, like the moon-bird's,
agonize when turned away
from your moon face.

Let me to taste nectar,
extinguish all traces of affliction.

O the son of Vallabh
alleviates distress.
Mind, heed his teachings.

Lord Chatrabhujā¹ removes all the pain
of the Braja people.²

* * * * *

Shri Gusainji, knowing of Chatrabhujādas's extreme separation, appeared to him in his divine blissful I form and said, "Chatrabhujādas, why are you so distressed? Stop worrying, I am always near you. Where Shri Nathji is, forever remain."

After consoling the poet, Shri Gusainji vanished and Chatrabhujādas, saturated with the bliss of his guru's form, sang :

* * * * *

None equal to Lord Vitthal
have ever appeared.

Not in the past has been
nor in the future will
such splendor manifest again.

He was born as a man in this age of struggle
for the cause of 'bhakti'.

1. Here, the poet's name, without 'das', refers to Krishna.
2. It is mentioned in a number of ancient scripture that Lord Krishna would appear as Shri Gusainji. This poem is a fine example of how the poet looked upon his guru as the Lord Himself.

Who again will have
the wealth of Nanda
and sport with the Braja folk?
Who has that graceful glance?

Who will mercifully accomplish his disciples' ends?

Who will tend the cows and cowlads
and again reside in Gokul,
such a pillar of 'dharma',
with knowledge and action.

Who will make 'bhakti' appear in this world?

Who is able to put their lotus hand
on some ignoble head
and send him to Vaikuntha?¹

Now, who is able to inspire
the bliss of music and food offerings
and make the celebration of 'rasa'?

Who can respect and be firm
in the essence of 'seva'?

Who will teach Krishna's ornamentation
with clothes and jewels?

Who will wave the lights round Shri Nathji
increasing the joy of love?

Who will praise the greatness
of the Mathura land with its birds and deer?
Who will make visible Krishna's 'svarupa'?

Who will again appear upon the earth
with such charisma?

1. Eternal abode.

Whose great qualities, fame and pastimes
will so pervade the world ?

Now, everyone is anxious to see
the son of Vallabh.

Chatrabhujadas hopes this much;
that his remembrance remains
the crown of my life.

* * * * *

While singing the glories of his guru, with his heart set on his lotus feet, Chatrabhujadas left his body and entered the Lord's 'lila'. His son, Raghodas, and all the Vaishnavas completed his last rites. Chatrabhujadas was a vessel of Shri Gusainji's grace and a great 'bhakta'.

CHITA SVAMI

In Krishna's eternal 'lila' Chita Svami is Krishna friend Subal during the day, while during the night, he is the Gopi Padma who is very attached to Shri Chandra-vali (Shri Gusainji's 'lila' form). For this reason, he had great devotion for his guru.¹

CHITA SVAMI TRIES TO FOOL SHRI GUSAINJI

Chita Svami was a Chaube Brahmin from Mathura and everyone called him Chitu. He led a group of four other Brahmins, all of them rascals by nature. One day, his four Brahmin cohorts considered, "Shri Gusainji casts many charms. Whoever goes to see him falls under his sway."

They told Chita Svami of their thoughts and explained "Let us deceive Shri Gusainji by offering him a counterfeit coin and empty coconut."²

1. Chita Svami is believed to have been born in 1516 A.D. in Mathura. Nothing is known about his parents or upbringing, but the fact that he had Birbal, Empero's Akbarr close associate as a religious client reveals that he must have been educated. He was probably married but there is nothing known about his wife. Chita means intellect; the faculty of reason and 'svami' can be translated as master. Hence his name means 'master of the mind'.

Of all the Vaishnava accounts in the 84 and 252 'vartas', only the eight poets are said to have two 'lila' forms. The reason for this some believe, is that their intimacy with Krishna required two forms to enjoy both His nocturnal and daytime 'lilas'.

2. A traditional way to pay one's respect to the guru is to offer him a coconut filled with milk and a coin at his feet.

Agreeing to their plan, they set out for Gokul. Arriving there, Chita Svami told the other four Brahmins, "You Stay outside. After I trick him, come in."

When Chita Svami entered Shri Gusainji's room, he suddenly realized that Shri Gusainji was Lord Krishna and was confounded. "I have come here to fool God. Fie upon myself for such a thought."

Hiding his cocount and counterfeit coin, he bowed before Shri Gusainji who greeted him, "Chita Svami, I have not seen you for a long time. How are you?"¹

Chita Svami immediately prayed to become his disciple, but Shri Gusainji objected, "You are a Chaube Brahmin, worshipable even by me. Why do you bow to me when you are sinner?"

Chita Svami confessed, "I don't know what sin I have committed which makes me this false, 'svami', but now that I have seen you, my fortune has been found. Shower that grace upon me which will remove my false 'svami' hood. By simply seeing you, my deceptive ways have been obliterated. Ocean of mercy, know me as yours. Accept me."

Chita Svami then sang :

* * * * *

Now I have recognized Krishna.
Cunning, I came here to deceive.

Not knowing the Lord,
not seeing the difference between
the great and insignificant,
I was covered by ignorance.

1. When Shri Gusainji greeted Chita Svami, "I have not seen you for a long time," he was referring to the thousands of births Chita Svami had been separated from the Lord.

Sings Chita Svami.
Shri Vitthalnathji¹
a treasure chest of mercy
has made me his own.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, the other four Chaube Brahmins from Mathura began to worry, "His charm has worked on Chitu. If we remain here, it will start to affect us. Let's get out of here."

Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji asked Chita Svami, "Have you brought me an offering?"

Chita Svami recollected, "The coin is counterfeit, the coconut hollow. How Can I offer them to him?" But ultimately he considered, "They will just be put in the storeroom and no one will even know from whence they came."

Shri Gusainji insisted, "Give me the offering. What are you hiding?"

After Chita Svami placed the cocount and the coin before him, Shri Gusainji told his water boy, "Cut the coconut open and give half to Chita Svami," and then requested Chita Svami, "Give some to your four Brahmin friends."

Chita Svami, amazed to see the ripe coconut, sang :

* * * * *

May I have the shelter
of his lotus-petal feet.

An ocean of grace,
the son of Vallabh,
has grabbed my arm
and liberated me from the worldly flow.

1. A name of Shri Gusainji.

His fresh nails
like the autumn full moon
remove anguish simply by recalling them.

Chita Svami says, "Shri Vitthal is Krishna.¹
His glories, the Vedas cannot fully extoll."

* * * * *

That afternoon, Shri Gusainji told Chita Svami to have the afternoon 'darshan' of Shri Navanita Priyaji (Child Krishna). Arriving in the temple, Chita Svami saw Shri Gusainji standing next to the young Lord and asked himself, "I just saw Shri Gusainji in His room. Perhaps he has come here by another route."

But when he returned to Shri Gusainji's room, he saw him sitting there as well.

He was unable to recollect how his guru could be at two places at once. That evening, after Chita Svami had taken his meal, Shri Gusainji told him, "Tomorrow, go have Shri Nathji's sight on the Govardhana Hill."

The following morning Ghita Svami set out for Shri Nathji's temple and arrived there in time for the mid-day 'darshan'. Again, he was amazed to see Shri Gusainji standing in the temple next to Shri Nathji and asked, "When did Shri Gusainji arrive?"

"Shri Gusainji is in Gokul," the Vaishnava replied.

1. Chita Svami signs most of his poems in this way, Chita Svami says, 'Shri Vitthal is Krishna' (Chitasvami Giridharan Shri Vitthal). His devotion to his guru and to God were inseparable. Of the eight poets, only Chita svami reminds us in almost every poem that his guru is Krishna. Shri Gusainji was the inspiring force behind his poetical genius,

Chita Svami finally concluded, "Yesterday I saw him in his room, in the temple there and now in the temple here. He is the Lord for he resides everywhere."¹

Chita Svami then set out for Gokul. He arrived in the afternoon and went before Shri Gusainji who asked him, "Did you have Shri Nathji's sight?"

"Maharaja," Chita Svami replied. "I had Shri Nathji's sight and you were standing there next to Him."

When Shri Gusainji smiled, Chita Svami sang :

* * * * *

Glories to Vasudeva
whose full course of austerties
matured into the fruit of Shri Vallabh.

Glories to Gopal who lived in Gokul.
Now he has returned to live in his home town.

Glories to those Gopis
who were the lines of the Vedas.

Says Chita Svami, "Shri Krishna and Shri Vitthalnath
are one and the same.

He is Krishna,
Krishna is he,

1. Mahaprabhu and Shri Gusainji did not often impress their followers with supernatural feats, for God cannot be truly understood in such a fashion. Sometimes, they would show a disciple an amazing act as did Shri Gusainji to Chita Svami, to strengthen their belief. 'Bhaktas' have all the supernatural powers waiting at their door, but never pay attention to them, being totally absorbed in the mood of loving devotion,

of this there is no doubt."¹

* * * * *

A few days later, Chita Svami requested initiation from Shri Gusainji, which he did in front of Shri Navanita Priyaji. Later, when Chita Svami requested to return home, Shri Gusainji told him to leave after taking the Lord's 'prasad'. When Chita Svami had completed the meal, he returned to Mathura where he saw his four Brahmin friends who asked him what had happened. The poet replied, "I am Shri Gusainji's disciple. Now, we can no longer stay together."

From that day, Chita Svami composed many poems and became famous.

CHITA SVAMI RENOUNCES BIRBAL

Once, when Chita Svami went to Raja Birbal's house to collect offerings, he sang late one night :

* * * * *

Hail, hail the glories of Shri Vallabh's son,

1. Vasudeva, Krishna's father, performed austerities in his previous birth. The Lord, pleased with his efforts, appeared to him and granted a boon. He requested to have the Lord as his son. In his life as Vasudeva, Krishna was born to him as a son, though, at the time, he was imprisoned by King Kamsa. Anxious to save the Child's life, the father escaped from jail and brought the Infant across the Yamuna river to Gokul where he left Him with Nanda and Yashoda. Chita Svami is saying that Vallabh is the son of Vasudeva. The poet then related that Gopal (Krishna) who lived in Gokul has now come to reside there again in the form of Shri Gusainji. Certain Gopis in previous births were the personified lines of the Vedas. Desirous of beholding God, they prayed to the Supreme for His sight, and were blessed with the vision of Krishna's 'lilas'. There they prayed to experience them. This wish was granted in their births as dairy maids (Gopis) in Braja at the same time Krishna manifested upon the earth. Finally, Chita Svami confirms the divinity of his guru. There are several ancient scriptures that attest to the fact that Shri Krishna would incarnate as Vallabhacharya's son Shri Gusainji.

epitome of bliss, destroyer of hypocrisy,
uplifter of the Vedas,
so holy, a mansion of pure austerity
his lovely form an essence.

Charmingly he speaks the Vedas
and the nectar of Krishna's 'lila'
to uplift all souls.

This esoteric reward,
the fruit of the nine-fold devotion,
he firmly accomplishes for all.

He frees an unconscious ghost,
liberates the sinner.

Lord, I don't have the brains
to praise you fully.
The expanse of your attributes so limitless.

Says Chita Svami,
Shri Vitthal is the Mountain Holder,
Krishna's incarnation.

* * * * *

Birbal, hearing his poem, thought, "About what is he singing?" He did not say anything until later when Chita Svami sang a poem which ended with the line :

* * * * *

Shri Vitthalnath and Shri Krishna
are one and the same.
He is Krishna and Krishna is he.

Of this there is no doubt.

* * * * *

Birbal, unable to contain himself, mentioned, "If our Muslim Emperor Akbar heard you equate Shri Gusainji with Shri Krishna, how would you explain yourself?"

Chita Svami said, "I would answer well, but your mind has become defiled. From this day I will never look upon your face again."

Chita Svami left and proceeded to Gokul. Meanwhile, Emperor Akbar, hearing of that discord, asked Birbal, "Why did Chita Svami get angry with you?"

Birbal replied, "Brahmins are like that. Over nothing he got furious. He sang two poems about his guru, Shri Gusainji. All I did was ask him what he would tell the Emperor if he heard those poems."

Akbar replied, "Birbal, what Chita Svami sang is true. Once, when I was passing by Gokul, Shri Gusainji gave me his blessing. At that time, I had a jewel that yielded two ounces of gold every day. I gave that jewel to Shri Gusainji. Taking it into his hands, he asked me three times, 'You are giving this to me?'"

"Each time I replied, 'Yes,' whereupon Shri Gusainji threw that jewel into the Yamuna river. I immediately objected, 'Return my jewel'.

"Shri Gusainji then put his hand into the Yamuna river and brought out a handful of such jewels and presented them to me. 'If your jewel is here, take it.'

"He repeated these words three times and when I finally replied, 'No,' he threw them back into the Yamuna river. Birbal, you were wrong and should not have doubted what

Chita Svami sang."¹

CHITA SVAMI REFUSES TO LEAVE

Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji heard that Chita Svami had renounced his religious client, Birbal, and had come to Gokul. At that time, Shri Gusainji told some Vaishnavas who had arrived from Lahore that he was going to send Chita Svami with them and that they should look after him. When those Vaishnavas left, Chita Svami came to the Govardhana Hill where he had Shri Nathji's blissful sight. Then, Chita Svami went before Shri Gusainji and told him the events that had transpired with Birbal. Shri Gusainji gave Chita Svami a letter of introduction to the Lahore Vaishnavas and told him, "Chita Svami, go to Lahore."

1. Birbal was one of the first Hindus to join Akbar's created religious sect, Dine Ihali, in 1582.

In the 252 vartas there it is told that Akbar once requested of Birbal, "You must tell me in the next few days how I can reach to God."

Birbal went to Vrindavan in search of holy information, where he spoke with many saints, but was not satisfied with their proposals. Disturbed that he could not give the Emperor a proper reply, he worried what sad consequences he would have to face.

Birbal's daughter, a devout follower of Shri Gusainji, saw her father's distress and asked him what was wrong. When he related his plight, she responded, "The solution is very easy. Go to Gokul. Shri Gusainji will give you the answer."

The following day, Birbal went to Shri Gusainji and told him what the Emperor wanted to know. "I will tell him," Shri Gusainji affirmed, "but he must come here."

Pleased, Birbal proceeded to Agra where he related to Akbar what Shri Gusainji had said. Akbar disguised himself and headed for Gokul alone. Arriving there, he asked the guru, "How can I find God?"

Shri Gusainji replied, "If I wanted to see you, the king, I would have to pass through so many guards and ministers and even, after great efforts, could not be sure of a personal audience with you. While, if you want to see me, then it is very easy to meet with you. The same is true with God. It is difficult to go to God, but if God wants to see you, then it is very simple."

"What will I do there," objected Chita Svami.

"The Vaishnavas will attend to you," Shri Gusainji replied. Then the poet sang :

* * * * *

I worship Shri Vitthalnathji.

I always serve him, the son of Vallabh.
What will I do in Banares.¹

That person should be called a demon
who leaves him to chase after another.

Says Chita Svami, "Shri Vitthalnath is Krishna.
His speech illuminates the Vedas."

* * * * *

After hearing that poem, Shri Gusainji knew the position of Chita Svami's heart. The poet explained, "I did not become a Vaishnava to beg from others. I will not leave your lotus feet for anything."

Pleased with Chita Svami's reply, the guru remarked, "All Vaishnavas should have that kind of 'dharma'."

Shri Gusainji then wrote a letter to the Vaishnavas in Lahore saying that Chita Svami was not able to join them, and if possible, they should send some money to Chita Svami, a poor Brahmin. When the Vaishnavas received Shri Gusainji's letter, they sent Shri Gusainji and Chita Svami generous offerings each year.

Shri Nathji looks after those Vaishnavas who have firm faith in Him. Devotees should have single-minded devotion like Chita Svami.

1. Banares is the sacred city of Shiva. Anyone who dies there is supposed to achieve liberation. It is clear that Chita Svami is not interested in such a liberation, having already tasted the nectar of devotion.

To what extent can we praise his 'varta'.¹

Chita Svami, perceiving the divinity of his guru's seven sons, then sang :

* * * * *

Krishna takes on the seven forms
of Shri Gusainji's sons
and plays.

Shri Vitthalnath forever appears
in the clan of Brahmins,
blessing us with 'bhakti'.

Shri Girdhar, king of kings,
has arisen to dwell in Braja.

Shri Govinda is a moon
who perfuses the world with nectar beams.

Shri Bal Krishna has wide eyes,
his beauty abashes billions of love gods.

Shri Gokulnathji is filled with splendid qualities,
a treasure of compassion and mercy.

Those who have accumulated pious merit
take the shelter of Shri Reghunath,
Shri Yadunath, and Shri Ghanshyam.

Says Chita Svami, "Shri Vitthal is Krishna.
By worshipping Him, all is transcended.
From eldest to youngest."

1. From another source, I have found the following account :

When Chita Svami heard that Shri Gusainji had left this world, he fell unconscious to the ground. At that time, Shri Nathji appeared to him and said, "Until now, I have appeared to you in two forms, as Krishna and as Shri Gusainji. Now I will let you experience me as Shri Gusainji's seven sons."

NANDADAS

Like the other Ashta Chhap poets, Nandadas has two forms in Krishna's 'lila'. In the day he is Krishna's friend, Bhoja, while during the night-time 'lila', Nandadas is the Gopi, Chandrarekha. He was born in the northeastern part of India, in Rampura.

NANDADAS MEETS SHRI GUSAINJI

Nandadas was Tulsidas's younger brother.¹

Tulsidas had his younger brother initiated into the Ram-worshipping Ramanandi sect of Vaishnavism. Nandadas, however, had a great love for the world, and passed his time watching dance shows. Tulsidas told his brother at great length to avoid such things, but Nandadas, did not heed his brother's advice.

Once, a group of people came through their town while en route to the sacred shrine of Dwarkanathji in Gujarat. Nandadas became inspired to accompany them. When he asked permission of his brother, Tulsidas warned him. "Don't go with them, You will suffer hardships on the way, meet impious people, become ruined, and then, never reach the sacred shrine. You would be much wiser to remember Lord Rama here, sitting in your own home."

1. Tulsidas is the famous saint-devotee who wrote the Ramacharitramanis, in praise of Lord Rama, which is chanted throughout India. Tulsidas is considered to be the moon of Hindi literature while Suradas is referred to as the sun.

"Even if you try a million different ways to stop me, I will not remain here. I absolutely must have Dwarkanathji's sight," declared Nandadas.

Tulsidas, realizing that he could not deter his younger brother, told one of the people in the group, Mukiya Sirdar, to look after his sibling and insure his safe arrival home. Mukiya Sirdar assured Tulsidas that he would do so. The group set out on pilgrimage, and, after some days, reached Mathura. Fascinated with the beauty of that city, Nandadas meandered to the Vishrant Ghat where he saw many men and women bathing. There, he conceived the plan first to have Shri Dwarkanathji's sight, and then return to live in Mathura.

Hearing that his group was going to remain in Mathura for another ten days, Nandadas decided to head towards Dwarka alone. On the following morning, he slipped away without anyone knowing and set out for his destination. Mukiya Sirdar searched all over Mathura in vain for his charge. Meanwhile, Nandadas took the wrong road and, instead of going to Gujarat, walked to Sinhananda in Punjab. He arrived at a town where a certain Kshatriya and his beautiful wife, disciples of Shri Gusainji, lived. When Nandadas passed their house, the Kshatriya's wife had just bathed and was standing drying her hair. Seeing her, Nandadas was enchanted and thought, "From now on, I will eat and drink water only after I have seen her face."

The following morning, Nandadas returned to her door and sat there the entire day. Observing Nandadas, the Kshatriya's wife's maid mentioned to her mistress, "A Brahmin has been sitting by your door since early morning. He has not even taken any water."

"Ask him what he wants," the Kshatriya's wife requested. The maid then inquired of Nandadas, "Why do you sit there?"

Nandadas replied, "I will drink water only after I see the face of the Kshatriya's wife. Then I will leave."

When the Kshatriya's wife heard what Nandadas had said, she replied, "I will not reveal my face to him."

"Wait, listen to this story," the maid explained. "Once, while your family was in Gokul to have Shri Gusainji's 'darshan', you accompanied the guru on his journey from Shri Gokul to Shri Nathji's temple on the Govardhana Hill. It was during the hot season and, on the way, you came across a Muslim lady, a fruit vender, dying of thirst. Seeing her, Shri Gusainji asked his water boy who she was.

"A Muslim lady who is unable to get out of the road," his water boy replied.

"The Muslim woman then told Shri Gusainji with her hands that she was thirsty. Shri Gusainji told his water boy, 'Quickly, give her some water.'

"The water boy answered, 'There are no wells or lakes nearby.'

"Give her some of my water,' Shri Gusainji ordered.

"The water boy objected, 'But your pitcher will become impure.'

"Shri Gusainji explained, 'A new pitcher can always be purchased, but this lady's life cannot. You should have compassion for every living creature.'

"The Muslim lady then drank some of Shri Gusainji's water, which had been offered to Shri Navanita Priyaji, and became refreshed. She sat up and said, 'I have heard about Krishna, but today I have seen him. You are truly a Gusainji (Lord) for saving my life.'

"From that day, she lived in Gokul selling fruits. Shri Gusainji was always pleased with her. After she left her body, she was born not far from Gokul, in Mahavan, as a Brahmin, became Shri Gusainji's disciple, and later achieved perfection.

"Similarly, you should have compassion for everyone. This Brahmin has been sitting by your door since the early morning without drinking any water."

Taking her maid's advice, the Kshatriya's wife went out and showed her face to Nandadas. From that day, Nandadas daily came to see the countenance of the Kshatriya's wife. When her husband discovered Nandadas, he approached him and said, "Because you come to our home every day to see my wife's face, everyone has started mocking us."

Nandadas replied, "I don't ask anything from you, nor do I ruin anything of yours. If you say another word to me about this I will kill myself and the murder will lie upon your head."

The Kshatriya, scared of being responsible for a murder, was silenced.

After a while, the entire town came to know of Nandadas. The Kshatriya, unable to tolerate the situation, sold his house, put his family's belongings in a wagon, and left the town for Gokul accompanied by ten to fifteen guras. The following morning, when Nandadas found their door locked, he asked their neighbors where everyone had gone. They rebuked him, "Because of you, they have left town and gone to Gokul."

Nandadas set out after them and by the later afternoon he reached their camp. Seeing Nandadas, the Kshatriya said, "The reason why we have left our home and country has now followed us."

The Kshatriya's men then started attacking Nandadas, demanding, "Why do you follow us?"

Nandadas backed off, replying, "This is not your town."

The following morning, when the Kshatriya's family set out, Nandadas followed them at a short distance. After some days, they reached the Yamuna River, just across from the town of Gokul. The Kshatriya considered, "Because of the agony this Brahmin has brought to us, we have had to leave our home. It would be good if he were prohibited from crossing the Yamuna River. Otherwise, we will be ridiculed in Gokul. Also, if Shri Gusainji hears of our situation, he will be displeased."

The Kshatriya approached the boatman, "I will give you some money if you promise not to take that Brahmin over there to the other side."

Agreeing, he brought the family across the river. The Kshatriya, his wife, and son then went to see Shri Gusainji. They arrived at the temple just in time to have Shri Navanita Priyaji's Raja Bhog 'darshan'. Afterward, when they went to offer their respects to Shri Gusainji, their guru greeted them, "Today, take your 'prasad' here."

After Shri Gusainji had taken his meals, he put out four plates for his guests. They immediately inquired, "We are only three. Why did you set four plates?"

Shri Gusainji replied, "Where will the Brahmin go whom you left on the other side of the Yamunaji?"

Full of shame, they related to Shri Gusainji, "We hoped that in Gokul we would not be ridiculed because of this Brahmin, but already our plight has become known."

Shri Gusainji consoled them, "Why are you troubled? He is a divine soul and has come here through your intervention. Now he will no longer trouble you."

Shri Gusainji then sent a Braja Vasi to fetch Nandadas from the opposite bank. Meanwhile, Nandadas sat by the Yamunanji singing songs in praise of the divine river:

* * * * *

For love,
first I came to you, Shri Yamuna,
for you know all about the condition
of your bhakta's mind.

I have so eagerly run here.
Whatever wish the heart cherishes,
you fulfil.

Nandadas's Lord is pleased with those
who sing Shri Yamunaji's glories.

* * * * *

Although Nandadas had not yet seen Shri Gusainji, through Shri Yamunaji's grace, he experienced divine love. Shri Mahaprabhuji has written, "Svabhavovijayabhavet", or "Yamunaji divinely transforms the nature of a soul." She is the mediator between the soul and Blissful Krishna. From observing Nandadas's state of mind while singing this poem, it becomes clear that he was not lusty for the Kshatriya's wife, but rather saw Krishna's beauty within her. Arriving at the Yamuna river, his love for Krishna, which had been temporarily fixated upon the Kshatriya's wife, climaxed in poetical verse. He signs the poem Nandadasani, which is a Sanskrit construction in the feminine gender, a further testimony that he was singing in the ecstatic mood of Gopihood, the zenith of bhakti :

* * * * *

Shri Yamunaji graces her bhaktas
by leaving her eternal realm
to rest upon the earth,
where she reveals that same divine lila.

She is everyone's benefactress
and bestows upon her souls
amazing forms like her own.

Nandadas knows her
and firmly grasps her feet.

How can my one tongue ever describe her ?
Sing Shri Yamuna, Shri Yamuna, Shri Yamuna.

Shesha, with his thousand heads,
daily sings of her,
yet still cannot fathom her.

She gives all pleasures,
so I say :
"Pronounce her name again and again."
Shri Yamunaji satisfies Nandadas's yearning.

Therefore, I declare,
"Every moment adhere your mind to her."¹

* * * * *

While absorbed in such songs, the Braja Vasi Shri Gusainji had sent arrived saying, "Shri Gusainji is calling you."

Bowing to the divine river, Nandadas happily boarded the boat and, landing in Gokul, went before Shri Gusainji. The guru's sight alone purified Nandadas's mind. His hands joined together while he prayed, "I have passed my life in search of trivial pleasure; now, take me under your shelter."

1. These three poems along with one other are Nandadas's contribution to a collection of forty poems by various authors in praise of the divine river, Yamunaji. Four poems of each of the ashta chhap poets, Shri Mahaprabhuji's great great grandson Harirayji, and of Gungabhai are represented in this great anthology. These poems are sung by thousands of people today throughout India. The following is a translation of Nandadas's fourth poem :

Shri Yamuna gives fortune and prosperity.
Leave worldly things
and worship graceful Yamuna.
Then you will find Krishna.
Associate with great bhaktas;
imbibe their message;
friend, constantly remain near them.
Declares Nandadas.
Shri Yamuna always remains with those
upon whom Shri Vallabh has showered his grace,

After Shri Gusainji formally accepted him as his disciple, Nandadas praised him in these poems :

* * * * *

Glories to the Lord of Rukmini,
the husband of Padmavati,
protector of the Brahmins,
giver of felicity,
the light of Vallabh's lineage,
remover of the world's disturbance.

Shining like a billion moons,
he eradicates misery.

Hail to that master of bhaktas,
uplifter of the fallen,
fulfiller of those who have desires.

To those who crave liberation, he gives bhakti.
Empowered with all the Lord's potencies,
his qualities are unlimited.

Glories to his name;
its mere remembrance
grants not only the fruit
gained by visiting all the sacred shrines,
but also residence in Braja.
where Krishna daily plays.

Nandadas's Lord,
the father of Girdhar and others,
is an incarnation of Shri Nathji.¹

* * * * *

1. Rukamini and Padmavati were Shri Gusainji's two wives and Girdhar, his eldest son. It is accepted among Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's followers that Shri Gusainji is an incarnation of Shri Nathji. The Lord told Vallabh to enter into wedlock so that he could be born as his son. This poem was sung in the mood of servitude, a prerequisite for experiencing the intimate moods of friendship, parental affection, and conjugal love for Shri Krishna, of which Nandadas later sings.

Pleased with Nandadas's poetry, Shri Gusainji told him to take 'prashad'. Nandadas went to the kitchen where he began eating his guru's leftovers. While he was partaking of the 'prashad', he started to experience Krishna's bliss form and, oblivious to everything else, just sat there, not even bothering to wash his hands. When the afternoon 'seva' was about to begin, the cook went to Shri Gusainji complaining, "Nandadas won't get up from the place where he took 'prashad'."

"Don't tell Nandadas anything," Shri Gusainji advised him.

The following morning, Shri Gusainji went to Nandadas and spoke into his ear, "It is time for 'darshan'; get up."

Nandadas then regained consciousness and, after bowing to Shri Gusainji, again started to sing his praises :

* * * * *

In the morning,
singing the pure sacred glories of Vallabh's son.

Both my eyes are cooled
to behold his face,
like Krishna's,
beautiful and endowed with fortune.

I intently listen
to the sweet enticing words
emerging from his splendid mouth
and establish them in my heart.

I achieve perfection
by offering my mind, body, and breath
in these ways.

May I always remain by his feet
and partake of his leftover 'prashad'.

Nandadas asks this of the Lord;
To stay the servant of Vallabh's family.

* * * * *

In the morning,
arise and take with your tongue
Shri Vallabh's name.

Bliss giver,
a lord who grants auspiciousness,
removes antagonism,
and fulfils the people's wishes.

A friend in this world and the next.
Who can retell his vast excellence ?

Nandadas's Lord,
the crown jewel
of those who savor mood,
rules the blissful realm of Gokul.¹

* * * * *

Filled with delight,
Yashoda sings lullabies
while caring for her child, Gopal.

She kisses him
and beholds his gorgeous body.

Transported with joy
she sings.

1. A song of praise to Shri Mahaprabhuji and then one to Shri Gusainji are sung every morning in the temple before Shri Nathji is awakened. In serving the Lord, it is auspicious first to invoke the guru's grace. To this day, these two poems of Nandadas above are frequently used in this part of the 'seva'.

Sometimes she rocks the cradle
and then breastfeeds Krishna.

Gazing upon the mother
of the Holder of the Mountain,
the Supreme Lord,
Nandadas discovers ecstasy.

* * * * *

NANDADAS SEES SHRI NATHJI

Once, when Shri Gusainji was planning to go from Shri Gokul to Shri Nathji's temple, Nandadas requested, "As you have graced me with the sight of Shri Navanita Priyaji here in Gukul, please allow me to see Shri Nathji."¹

The following morning, after Shri Gusainji completed Shri Navanita Priyaji's 'seva', he set out with Nandadas for the Govardhana Hill. They arrived there in the early afternoon and, while having Shri Nathji's sight, Nandadas sang :

* * * * *

Glorious is his striped turban;
gorgeous are the boy's deer eyes.

His resplendent cheeks reflect
his jangling earrings.

The colorful one's body
is saturated with new beauty.

1. At that time, Shri Nathji resided in the present day Jatipura, some twelve miles from Gokul. During the reign of Aurenzeb, in the 17th century, Shri Nathji and Navanita Priyaji went to Rajasthan where they were protected from the Moguls by king of Udaipur. To this day, both Shri Nathji and Navanita Priyaji reside in Nathdwara, an hour's ride from Udaipur in Rajasthan. Now, Shri Nathji's is the second largest temple in India.

The likes of him
has never been
nor will ever be.
Nandadas pleads,
"Friend, what can I do ?
I've been struck by Love's spell."¹

* * * * *

When the next period of 'darshan' opened, Nandadas sang these four songs :

* * * * *

Krishna comes from the forest
with his friends
behind the cows.

The beauty of the dust on his curly locks
charms; indescribable splendor.

The jingling bells on his dazzling sash
allure.

1. Nandada's poems are the most difficult Braja Bhasa poems to compose into English. In the above poem, the word, rang, which means color, beauty, condition, merriment, as well as other things, depending upon the context, has been used seven times in three lines in conjunction with various prefixes. This gives the poem a rich resonance of sound and meaning. For example, "Sohat surang durang pag kurang lalana kesai loyan lone" are the opening words of the poem, meaning "Glorious is his striped turban; gorgeous are the boy's deer eyes".

A fine example of alliteration in this song is found in the line "Kal kundal kanan kone", "jangling earrings". Nandadas draws from a word and metaphor reservoir which is, perhaps, the most vast of all the Braja Bhasa poets. The word, "Rangrangile", which translates as "The colorful one", indicates that Nandadas, for the first time, is singing in the supreme mood of conjugal love. The implication here is that Krishna is saturated with the color of conjugal love.

He wanders about,
playing sweet melodious tunes on his flute.

Yashoda wipes the face
of Nandadas's Lord
and kisses him without fatigue.

* * * * *

Yashoda's lad
comes from the forest
singing the Gori raga.

Stick in hand,
walking behind the cows,
the son of Nanda
puts the flute to his lips,
as if to cast a spell.

The one who wears a yellow waist cloth
has erased the restrictions of our clan.

The milk maids climb upon the roof
to catch a glimpse of him.
They are stunned.

Says Nandadas,
"Great is the fortune
of those who have seen
Hari's face."¹

* * * * *

1. Yashoda, in the first poem, and the Gopis (milk maids) in the second, express their joy in seeing their Loved One after a day filled with separation from Krishna, while he tended the cows in the forest. Nandadas sings in the two devotional moods of parental affection and conjugal love, respectively, the predominant sentiments of puṣṭi bhakti.

Sakhi,
look at Hari's lotus face.

The nectar lake
of his blossoming visage
draws black bees
and the god of love.

Covered with the dust of the cows
and sweet pollen,
so fine his lips.

Describes Nandadas:
His pearl nose ring
looks like a cluster of dew drops.¹

* * * * *

The women of Gokul make excuses
to come to Yashoda's home.

Not seeing Krishna's great face
time won't pass.

Once they see that countenance,
they forget their household work.

They borrow a light from Yashoda's house
and on the way home extinguish it.

Returning once again,
they elaborately blame the wind.

1. Of the eight ashta chhap poets, Nandadas is called the Jariya, while the rest are said to be Gariyas. The other seven shape the gold setting for the jewel, the work of a Gariya, while Nandadas places the gem within it, the Jariya's art. This distinction is given to him because of his unequalled ability to play with words. He is a master of metaphor. For example, "His pearl nose ring looks a cluster of dew drops". While traditional Indian comparisons, Nandadas creates many new ones.

Nandadas's eyes are stuck to Nanda's son.
Without seeing him
a moment passes like four cons.

* * * * *

Nandadas sang many such poems before Shri Nathji while he lived with Suradas for six months at Parasoli, near the Govardhana Hill.

TULSIDAS WRITES TO HIS BROTHER

Once, a group of people from Mathura, of which five or ten were Vaishnavas, passed through Tulsidas's town. Tulsidas asked them if they had heard of his brother, Nandadas, who had gone in the direction of Mathura. One Vaishnava replied, "There is one Nandadas who has become the disciple of Shri Gusainji. Before, he was a very worldly man, but now he is a great 'bhakta'."

Tulsidas considered, "Now that Nandadas has become Shri Gusainji's follower, he will not listen to my advice."

Tulsidas then asked the Vaishnava if one of his contingent would deliver a letter to Nandadas. When the Vaishnava replied that the following day someone was going to Gokul, Tulsidas immediately wrote a letter in which he said to Nandadas, "Not only is it improper, but, moreover, it is immoral, that you have left your husband, Ram, with whom you have taken vows. When you return, I will show you how to be faithful to your Lord."

The messenger later gave that letter to Shri Gusainji who handed it to Nandadas. Nandadas after reading his brother's missive, replied to him, "First I was married to Ram, but Krishna came and stole me away. If Ram had enough strength, he would not have let me go. Lord Ram is married to only one woman, Sita. How is he able to care for a second wife when he was not even able to look after his first properly? After all, he allowed the demon, Ravana, to carry Sita away. Shri Krishna

is the Lord of infinite women. His wives are fearless. At one and the same time, Krishna affords bliss to all of them. For this reason, I have chosen Krishna as my husband. I have offered my body, mind, and wealth, in this world as well as the next, to Shri Krishna. I am under his will."¹

Nandadas then wrote a poem to his brother :

* * * * *

"Friend,
since I have heard
and listened to Krishna's name,
my eyes well with tears,
my mind reels,
words can't emerge from my mouth,
and the condition of my body
has become something else.

I performed fasts,
righteous acts, and observances
in so many ways,
with my whole body.

And then I heard Krishna's name.

1. In the Krishna Upanishad it is mentioned that once, while Rama and Sita were walking in the forest, the sages there, who were absorbed in the meditational state of Samadhi, saw Ram's divine beauty and suddenly desired to be his lover. They approached Ram, saying, "Give us the pleasure that you afford your wife, Sita."

Ram replied that in his current incarnation he was Maryada Purushottam, that is, the Supreme Personality under the bondage of scriptural restriction. Therefore, he could have only one wife. He consoled them that in his next life as Krishna, he would be Pushti Purushottam, the Supreme Personality who is dominated by grace. Then, he would fulfil all their wishes. These sages were born in Braja as Gopis during Krishna's life on earth and had all of their divine desires satisfied.

This is consonant with Nandadas's words to his brother.

Says Nandadas,
"If that state occurs
to one who has but heard His name,
just imagine what fortune occurs
from the sight of his sweet form !"

* * * * *

When Tulsidas received that letter, he knew that his brother would never return.¹

TULSIDAS VISITS BRAJA

One day, Tulsidas decided to journey to Gokul to see his younger brother. Arriving in Mathura after many days of travel, he asked some local people if a Brahmin by the name of Nandadas had come to their city. Someone advised him that Nandadas was a disciple of Shri Gusainji and that he could be found either in Gokul or near the Govardhana Hill. Tulsidas went to Gokul, but did not find Nandadas. Tulsidas, so enchanted with the beauty of that town, wondered how his brother could have ever left such a place. Hearing that Nandadas was at the Govardhana Hill with Shri Gusainji, Tulsidas headed in this direction. He found his brother in the town of Parasoli and insisted, "Come with me. If there is a beautiful town in this world, it is Ayodhya; Banares is the supreme city; of all mountains, most glorious is Chitrakuta; and among forests, the Dandkarnaya is the best. These areas Lord Ram has purified."

Nandadas replied to his brother in the following poem .

1. Even though the name and form of Krishna are considered to be identical, there is special importance given to Krishna's form. Svapna asakti, attachment to Krishna's form, is looked upon as a more refined devotional state than Nam Asakti, attachment to his name. The one who knows Krishna's form always knows his name, while the reverse is not necessarily true.

* * * * *

If you like mountains,
live by the Govardhana Hill.

If you like towns,
then reside in Nandagam.

If you prefer cities,
live in Mathura,
an ocean of splendor,
extremely pleasing.

If you enjoy rivers,
stay by the banks of Yamuna,
the fulfiller of all wishes.

Nandadas relishes the forest
and dwells in the land of Vrindavan.¹

* * * * *

After meeting with Suradas in Parasoli, Nandadas proceeded to Shri Nathji's temple, while Tulsidas followed behind. When Tulsidas had Shri Nathji's sight, he did not bow down to Him. Nandadas then knew that Tulsidas would not bow before anyone other than his beloved Ram. Nandadas then considered, "I will show him that his Lord Ram is here as well as in Gokul. Only then will he come to know of Shri Krishna's greatness."²

Nandadas then prayed to Shri Nathji :

1. Vrindavan means tsiu forest. Vrindavan includes not only the city of this name. but also the entire Braja region, which is divided into Front, Middle and End Vrindavan.
2. The fact that Tulsidas would not bow to Krishna reveals his single-minded devotion to his Lord, Ram, a quality so necessary in fostering bhava, mood. His refusal to bow to Krishna was not disrespectful, but rather a statement of his immense and faithful love for Ram. Devotion to a single form of God is considered a sign of great grace.

* * * * *

Lord, so finely adorned,
what can I say of your splendor today?
Tulsi lowers his head only
when in your hand the bow and arrow stay.

* * * * *

Hearing Nandadas's prayer, Shri Nathji thought, "Shri Gusainji's disciple is making a request. I should listen to him."

Shri Nathji then took on Lord Ram's form and held the bow and arrow. Tulsidas, seeing Shri Nathji as Lord Ram, prostrated himself flat on the ground. After having Shri Nathji's 'darshan', Tulsidas and Nandadas went to Shri Gokul where Nandadas said to Shri Gusainji, "My brother, Tulsidas, will bow only to Lord Ram."

Shri Gusainji welcomed Tulsidas, "Come and sit down."

At that time, Shri Gusainji's fifth son, Shri Raghunath, (another name for Lord Ram) was standing close by. Shri Gusainji called to his son, "Raghunathji, one of your followers has come here. Give him your 'darshan'." Raghunathji and his newly wedded wife Shri Janaki, divinely appeared to Tulsidas as Sita and Lord Ram. Beholding the divine couple, Tulsidas bowed down to them and later sang the following song :¹

* * * * *

I praise the towns of Gokul and Ayodhya.

There reside Sita Ram
while here Radha Krishna.

1. Shri Raghunathji is considered to be an incarnation of Lord Ram.

There the Saraju flows amazingly,
here the Shri Yamuna river.

Both forms remove the impurities
of this age of struggle
and the suffering of all their bhaktas.
Ram, wearing a jewelled diadem,
stands with his brother, Lakshman.

Krishna is adorned with a peacock crown,
his brother, Balaram, by his side.
There, the smiling Ram
liberated his bhakta, Kevata.

Here, Krishna uplifted the king
from the well with his own hand.
There, Ram, who is an ocean of virtue,
granted Sabari heaven.

Here, Krishna took sandal balm
from the hunchback, Kubja,
and fulfilled all her desires.

For the benefit of their bhaktas,
Ram and Krishna
have incarnated as men.

Tulsidas depends on those two
who will take anyone
to the liberated shore.¹

* * * * *

1. Now it seems that Tulsidas has put Ram and Krishna on the same level, probably something he was not ready to do before his visit with Nandadas.

Actually, Ram and Krishna should not be seen as different. They are both full incarnations of God, the only distinction being that Krishna is governed by grace, while Ram, by scriptural law. Souls are devoted to one form or the other according to their qualification and spiritual inclination.

Tulsidas's poem is an example of the great religious tolerance despite quite disparate beliefs, found in India.

Tulsidas then bowed before Shri Gusainji and said, "Nandadas used to be very worldly. How is it that now he is such a great 'bhakta'?"

Shri Gusainji explained, "Nandadas's spiritual qualification was great. Therefore, he came to this path. He is now addicted to the Lord. His 'bhakti' is firm."¹

Tulsidas then returned to Banares.

NANDADAS COMPOSES THE BHAGAVATA INTO BRAJA BHASA

Once, Nandadas thought, "As my brother has written the story of Ram in the vernacular; so I should translate the 'lilas' of Krishna as depicted in the Bhagavata into Braja Bhasa."

After Nandadas completed the tenth canto, in which Krishna's 'lilas' are described, the Brahmin pandits from Mathura joined together and went before Shri Gusainji saying, "We make our living by reading the Bhagavata. Now that your disciple, Nandadas, has written it in the Braja Bhasa, no one will listen to our Bhagavata lectures and we will be without a source of income. Please resolve this complication."

Shri Gusainji then called Nandadas and told him, "Your Braja Bhasa version of the Bhagavat will deprive the Mathura Brahmins of their livelihood. Therefore, you should keep the five 'rasa lila' chapters and throw the rest of it into the Yamunaji."

1. Three stages of bhakti have been mentioned by Shri Mahaprabhuji. First, love for, then attachment to, and finally addiction to God. In this last stage, which Nandadas has experienced, the bhakta can no longer live without the Blessed Lord.

Following his guru's advice, he tossed much of his translation into those waters.¹

RUP MANJARI

Once, Emperor Akbar, accompanied by Raja Birbal, came to Mathura. Raja Birbal made a side excursion to the Govardhana Hill to see Shri Gusainji. Upon returning to Mathura, Emperor Akbar questioned Raja Birbal, "Where did you go?"

"To see Shri Nathji, Shri Gusainji and his son, Girdharji," replied his companion.

Hearing of these attractions, the emperor decided, "I too shall go to the Govardhana Hill."

Two days later, Akbar arrived at his destination. He had a maid, Rup Manjari, who was a disciple of Shri Gusainji. She had received the Lord's grace and had Shri Nathji's divine sight. Nandadas had great affection for her, and, hearing that she had come with Akbar, went to find her.

At that time Rup Manjari went off to an isolated place to prepare an offering for Shri Nathji. When Nandadas found her, she had just offered the food to Shri Nathji. Seeing her together with the Lord, Nandadas was enthralled. Standing behind a nearby tree, he sang:

* * * * *

Pretending to look at a picture,
the very clever milk maid,

1. Raghunathji, Shri Gusainji's fifth son, has named his father, in his Shri Namaratrakhyam Stotram Prayer, "Gobrahamana Pranaraskhapa", one interested in the protection of the lives of cows and Brahmins. This account clearly reveals this quality. In the Nandadas Granthavali, 28 chapters of the poet's version of the Bhagavat's tenth canto plus the five chapters dealing with the 'rasa lila' and Bhramanr Gita have been published. The other 67 chapters of the tenth canto are not available, and were probably never recovered from the Yamuna river.

concealing her gaze,
turns towards Krishna.

She focuses directly upon his face,
with eyes unblinking,
while pretending to arrange her hair.

Yashoda, spotting her,
draws a curtain
across the gracious triple-arched terrace
and bring Krishna's food on a golden tray.

While Nandadas's Lord eats at home,
he puts his hand upon his heart,
signals a rendezvous to the milk maid,
and grins.

* * * * *

Rup Manjari, hearing Nandadas sing his poem, looked around and, seeing him behind the tree, called, "Why are you hiding? Come here."

"Because Shri Nathji came to partake of your offering, I stood at a distance."

Rup Manjari then offered Nandadas some of the Lord's 'prashed'. They sat down together and joyfully took their meal. After eating, Rup Manjari said, "Through Krishna's grace I have come here. How fine it would be if I could remain here with you forever."

Nandadas assured her, "The Lord will arrange it for you."
"I no longer want to see this mundane world," said Rup Manjari.

Meanwhile, Tansen, the emperor's singer, sang one of Nandadas's poems in front of Akbar:

* * * * *

Look at that dexterous one
dancing on Yamuna's banks,
surrounded by dairy maids,
his peacock crown
cocked to one side,
adorned in a dancing skirt,
belled sash,
a luminous yellow cloth.

His iridescent earrings glow enough
to stop the sun god's chariot.

Tata thai, tata thai,
the notes rise and ascend the scale
while the feet beat out the measure.

In the Rasa dance,
Krishna's flute repeats
'Radha, Radha',
while Nandadas sings in close proximity.

* * * * *

Akbar, pleased with Nandadas's poem, asked where the poet lived. Raja Birbal then explained, "He resides here by the Govardhana Hill and is a great 'bhakta'."

"Call him here," demanded Akbar.

Raja Birbal replied, "He will not come in that way. I will personally go to him tomorrow and bring him here."

The following day, after Raja Birbal had seen Shri Gusainji, he approached Nandadas, "Emperor Akbar has called for you,"

Nandadas replied, "What do I have to do with Akbar? I don't desire any money, nor do I have any that he could take from me."

"If you don't go to him, he will come to you," said Raja Birbal.

"Don't bring him here," Nandadas objected. "After Shri Nathji's 'seva' is completed this evening I will go there."

That evening, Nandadas arrived at the Mansi Ganga Lake in the nearby town of Govardhana where he saw Emperor Akbar and Raja Birbal sitting. Akbar respectfully greeted Nandadas and said, "You have composed a poem about the 'rasa lila' in which you said that 'Nandadas sings in close proximity'. Why did you lie like that? In what way could you come close to that dance?"

Nandadas replied, "You will not believe what I tell you. You keep a maid, Rup Manjari. Ask her."

Akbar then returned to his tent and asked Rup Manjari, "What is the meaning of Nandadas's 'rasa' poem?"

Hearing Akbar's words, she fell to the ground, left her material body, and reentered Krishna's eternal realm. Akbar ran back to Nandadas, and, to his great astonishment, found that the poet had also died. Akbar then asked Raja Birbal, "Why did both of them die like that?"

Raja Birbal explained, "They kept their 'dharma'. They were not able to tell you about the 'rasa', and that was the only solution open to them."

When Shri Gusainji heard about Nandadas passing away, he praised him, "Vaishnavas should conceal their 'dharma' as Nandadas did and not openly reveal it to others."

Nandadas was a great 'bhakta' who had received the Lords's grace and showed, through his poetry, the wealth of His blissful form.¹

1. Shri Hariraya has written in his 'Dana lila', "Prakata te ras jay". That is if, one reveals the nectar mood to the unqualified, it leaves the heart. Nandadas's relationship to Rup Manjari was divine.

GOVINDA SVAMI (GOVINDADAS)

Govinda Svami in Krishna's eternal 'lila' is Shri Dama as the Lord's friend during the day, and Bhama Gopi during the nocturnal play.

GOVINDA SVAMI MEETS HIS GURU

Govinda Svami lived in the town of Antari where everyone called him 'svami'. He had many disciples and was a good devotee.¹

Govinda Svami left Antari to live in Braja in the town of Mahavan, for he thought that he would be able to achieve Krishna's lotus feet by living in His sacred realm.²

Govinda Svami was a great poet and composed a vast literature. Once, someone learned one of his poems and sang it before Shri Gusainji, who, pleased with the poem, gave the

-
1. Antari was ruled by the Bharatpur king so it must not have been very far from the Govardhana Hill. Govinda Svami is believed to have been born in 1505 A. D. There is no information about his parents. He was a householder until he became Shri Gusainji's disciple when he renounced his family to live in Braja. At that time, he was about thirty years old.
 2. It is commonly believed to this day that by living in the area where Lord Krishna sported, the 'bhakta' will receive His grace. Braja, the area around the modern-day city of Vrindavan is considered to be the holiest tract of land in India and forever freed from the final destruction which the rest of the world must undergo.

singer some 'prashad'. Later, that singer returned to Govinda Svami and told him how Shri Gusainji had appreciated his poem. Govinda Svami considered, "If there is anything of value in this world, it is the town of Shri Gokul and Shri Gusainji who resides there. But, for some reason, I am unable to go and see him."

Many days later, a disciple of Shri Gusainji came to Vrindavan and there met Govinda Svami who asked him, "How is it possible to know Krishna's 'lilas'?"

The Vaishnava began explaining, "I was also eager to know the same thing. I will tell you later."

Anxious to hear, Govinda Svami persisted, "Please, tell me now."

Observing his eagerness, the Vaishnava began, "In these days, Shri Gusainji has Lord Krishna under his control. One can find Krishna through him. It is useless to take another shelter."

Govinda Svami requested, "Take me to your guru."

The following morning, both of them set out for Gokul and arrived there as Shri Gusainji arrived at the Yamuna river to bathe and perform his daily rites. Approaching, the Vaishnava pointed out his guru to Govinda Svami, "He is Shri Gusainji."

Seeing him, Govinda Svami thought, "Doing all those rituals he looks like someone who follows the path of Karma. How can he unite anyone to Krishna?"¹

After Shri Gusainji finished his prayers, he called, "Govinda Svami when did you arrive?"

"Just now," Govinda Svami replied astonished, and thought, "How did he know my name? There must be some reason."

1. Krishna is not achieved through any ritual, but only through love."

Shri Gusainji returned to the temple where Govinda Svami was granted the sight of Krishna's all blissful 'lila'. Afterwards, Govinda Svami said to Shri Gusainji, "You are very tricky. On the outside it appears that you are performing Vedic rites while actually the Blessed Lord resides here with you."

The guru replied, "Devotional love is the fruit. The Path of Karma are the thorns."

The fruit cannot emerge without proper protection. The Vedic rituals are a thorned fence around the esoteric fruit of devotion.

Govinda Svami was very pleased to hear Shri Gusainji's explanation, became his disciple, and began to dwell in Gokul.¹

GOVIND SVAMI TALKS WITH KRISHNA

Govinda Svami daily went to Mahavan and, while singing there, Krishna would give him His sight. Sometimes, Madan Gopaldas would accompany the poet and write down the poems he sang. Once, Govinda Svami said to the Lord, "I will now play a straight beat."

1. At the time of initiation, as an offering to the guru, Govinda Svami sang the following poem :

* * * * *

The son of Shri Vallabh
is splendid in form,
peerless, beyond description.

Supreme bliss has manifested
and dwells in the town of Gokul,
bestowing felicity upon the whole world.

He grants liberation and 'bhakti'
to his own souls-
His graceful love plentifully rains.

Madan Gopaldas, not being blessed with Krishna's sight, wondered, "To whom are you talking to? No one else is here."

Govinda Svami replied, "I just babble to myself like that," but he did not reveal his heart to him.¹

GOVINDA SVAMI'S DEATH

One day, Shri Gusainji asked Govinda Svami, "How does Krishna sing?"

"Krishna sings well," replied Govinda Svami, "but his consort, Shri Svaminiji, has a more melodious voice. To hear her sing with Krishna is truly an experience."

Hearing his reply, Shri Gusainji laughed.

Once, the disciples Govinda Svami made before accepting Shri Gusainji as his guru came to Gokul and asked where Govinda Svami resided. Arriving at his home, Govinda Svami's sister advised them that he had gone to bathe. They went to the Yamuna river where they asked Govinda Svami, not recognizing him as their guru, "Where is Govinda Svami?"

He replied, "Govinda Svami died a long time ago."

As they returned to Govinda Svami's house, they finally recognized their guru, who had returned by another route and considered to themselves, "When we saw him by the Yamuna

Blissful

Bliss form,

bliss giving.

What can one tongue explain?

Govinda celebrates over him-

1. Although Govinda Svami saw the Lord and talked to Him, Madan Gopaldas was not devotionally qualified to behold Krishna. In order to see and hear Krishna, the senses must become divinely transformed. Govinda Svami was following his guru's advice not to reveal his divine experiences to the unqualified.

river Govinda Svami said that he had died, but here in front of us is our guru."

They approached him, "Govinda Svami, you said Govinda Svami passed away."

"If he hasn't died yet," replied Govinda Svami, "now he will."

He answered his former disciple in this manner because his position as a 'svami' spiritual master concluded when he became the 'das' (servant) of Shri Gusainji.¹

Govindadas then took them to Shri Gusainji where they became his disciples. After spending a few days in Gokul, they all returned to their homes in Antari.

NOT A YAMUNA BATH

Govindadas never bathed, not even waded, in the Yamuna river. He bathed at a well by the river's sacred banks, rolled in her sands and drank her waters from the palm of his hands. He knew the Yamuna river to be Krishna's divine consort and thought, "How can I put this useless body into her sacred waters?"

One day, Shri Gusainji's sons, Shri Bal Krishnaji and Shri Gokulnathji, went to the Yamuna river where Govindadas was preparing to bathe in the well nearby and began to discuss with each other, "Today we should make Govindadas take his bath in the Yamuna river."

They grabbed the poet and began to lead him towards the river. Govindadas demanded, "Don't make me bathe in the Yamuna river. Yamunaji is Krishna's beloved consort,

1. A Vaishnava in the Path of Grace does not strive for the position of guru. Guruship is handed down within Vallabhacharya's lineage. The title guru or 'svami' should only be given to those enlightened souls who are capable of uplifting their disciples; otherwise, both fall. From this point in the 'varta' Govinda Svami is called Govindadas.

her form is divine and full of 'lila'. Why do you want to put this worthless body of mine into her waters?"

Heeding his words, the two brothers let go of Govindadas and, at that moment, had the sight of Shri Yamunaji's divine form as Krishna's beloved. Govindadas exclaimed, "Only supreme things should be offered to this river."¹

SHRI GUSAINJI'S BHAGAVATA

One night, Shri Gusainji explained to Govindadas one sloka from the Bhagavata and elaborated upon that line for half the night. While returning home, Govindadas met Shri Gusainji's sons, Shri Gokulnathji and Shri Govindarayji, who questioned Govindadas, "What did you hear from Shri Gusainji?"

Govindadas replied, "What can I say, only he is able to relate what he said."

Shri Gokulnathji then commented, "Govindadas knows my father well."

HOW DID SHRI NATHJI PARTAKE?

One day, Shri Nathji and Govindadas went to play by the Apsara lake. When Govindadas left for Shri Nathji's temple where he found that the Raj Bhog offering and 'darshan' had already been completed, he told his guru, "How did Shri Nathji partake of the offerings when he was out playing with me?"

Shri Gusainji then had another offering prepared and presented to the Lord.

1. Shri Yamunaji has three forms. One as a material river, visible to all, the second as a sacred river capable of granting to her favored souls great devotional powers, and, lastly, as Krishna's divine consort. A common Hindi expression says, "Gang Snana Yamunā Pan". "Bathe in the Ganges River and sip Shri Yamunaji's water."

Here the question arises that, if Shri Nathji went out to play with Govindadas, who was worshipped in the temple? In reply to this it is explained that Shri Krishna has two forms. In one form He uplifts His 'bhaktas' in a special way while, in His other form, He uplifts all beings. Not everyone is able to see the form in which he liberates His 'bhaktas' thoile everyone is able to see His 'sarvoddharaka' (all liberating) form. It was in this form that Shri Nathji enjoyed the offering while Govindadas played with Shri Nathji's 'bhakta uddharaka' 'bhakta'-liberating form. Because Govindadas was a 'bhakta' who had special experiences with Shri Krishna, Shri Gusainji understood what the poet said to be Shri Nathji's personal wish and had another offering prepared.

SHRI NATHJI'S FRIEND

Govindadas, Kumbhanadas, and the cowherd, Gopinathji, were Shri Nathji's intimate friends and Shri Gusainji showed them everything about Krishna.

Shri Nathji used to play all alone with Govindadas at the far end of the Govardhana Hill. Once, when Shri Nathji was returning from his sport to take his lunch in the temple, the cook, Gopaldas, saw both of them coming and later mentioned what he had seen to Shri Gusainji. The guru remained silent for a moment and then offered Shri Nathji His lunch. Govindadas was a full recipient of his guru's grace.¹

KRISHNA'S TURBAN

One day, when Govindadas saw Shri Nathji's 'pecha' (an

1. Of all the eight poets, as well as the other Vaishnava disciples of Shri Mahaprabhu and Shri Gusainji, Govindadas is depicted as being Shri Nathji's best friend. Not only did Krishna shower upon him 'sakha bhava', the feeling of being the Lord's friend, but also Govindadas experienced Shri Nathji's intimate conjugal 'lila'. These accounts of Govindadas are perfect examples of how God must forsake His majesty if He wishes to enjoy the blissful association of His 'bhaktas'.

ornament that it tied onto the turban) crooked, he asked the Lord, "Why is your 'pecha' lopsided?"

Shri Nathji replied, "Fix it."

Govindadas then entered the temple, tightened Shri Nathji's turban, and set straight His 'pecha'. When Shri Gusainji entered into the temple, one of the temple priests complained, "Govindadas touched Shri Nathji and defiled the temple."

Shri Gusainji replied, "Shri Nathji cannot be made impure by Govindadas's touch. Continue with the offerings."¹

PEBBLE FIGHT

Once, when Govindadas was singing before Shri Nathji, the Lord threw some pebbles at the poet. Govindadas then threw a pebble at Shri Nathji and startled Him. When Shri Gusainji saw that, he reprimanded Govindadas, "What have you done?"

"Do you only think about your own son," replied Govindadas, "and never consider the plight of others? He threw three stones at me, just look at my back. After all, in play, no one is a big shot."

Shri Gusainji was silenced by Govindadas's reply.²

UNFINISHED SONG

One evening, during the spring, Govindadas sang the

1. A special state of purity is maintained in the temple wherein outsiders like Govindadas who have not bathed in the regulated way cannot enter the inner chambers. But because Govindadas always played with Shri Nathji, the touch of such an enlightened soul can never be impure.
2. To throw stones at God is not acceptable in any religion, but when they are aimed with love, even the Lord must accept them gladly, for He has pledged in the Gita to accept all who direct their feelings towards Him, no matter what they be.

following song when Shri Gusainji was offering Shri Nathji a betel leaf.

* * * * *

Govardhan Lal, eyes wide and shifting,
your breast is decked
with a forest garland.
You enchant all the women of Braja.

Frolicking playfully,
Krishna arrives on the path
where the ladies go to fetch water.

He tugs the jugs off their heads;
no one is allowed to draw from the well.
The son of Nanda romps and fills the hearts
of all the Gopis when they behold his face.

Beloved Krishna covers his hands
with a paste of vermilion powder.

He stealthily sneaks up,
smears the Gopis' cheeks,
and dashes away.

* * * * *

After singing that much, Govindadas stopped and Shri Gusainji questioned, "Why don't you finish the song?"

"Maharaja," Govindadas replied, "my mind is entangled in Him and, as I have sung, he dashed away. Now, how can there be any more song when Krishna has left?"

Shri Gusainji was enthralled to hear the poet's reply and, that evening, after completing Shri Nathji's 'seva', he climbed down from the hill and completed Govindadas's poem:

* * * * *

In this way Krishna plays
the spring sport of 'Holi' with the Braja damsels.

Over Govardhan's form
Govinda's people rejoice.¹

* * * * *

SHRI NATHJI'S TORN CLOTHES

During the winter, Shri Nathji and Govindadas used to play in a grove of Kadam trees about two miles west of the Govardhana Hill in a place called Shyam Dak. There, one day, Shri Nathji, while playing with his other friends, climbed a tree and played his flute while Govindadas sat at a distance and sang his praises. Meanwhile, Shri Gusainji entered Shri Nathji's temple. At the same time, the Lord told Govindadas, "I must return to my temple. The afternoon 'seva' is about to begin. What will Shri Gusainji say when he does not see me there?"

As Shri Nathji jumped down from the tree, one of his garments entangled in a branch and ripped off as he scrambled back to the temple. When Shri Gusainji saw that Shri Nathji's clothes were torn, he asked the door guard, Rupa Proiya, "Has anyone entered the temple?"

1. Shri Gusainji signed the poem, Jana Govinda which I have loosely translated as Govinda's people. 'Jana', a Sanskrit word, is composed of 'ja', 'to be born', and 'na', meaning 'not'. Thus, those who will never take birth again are Govinda's people. This account clearly reveals how Govindadas as well as the other great poets did not work out their poetry before singing it in front of Shri Nathji. Rather, as they gazed upon Shri Nathji's form, they witnessed His infinite 'lilas' and spontaneously described them in verse. Because Shri Nathji disappeared from Govindadas, his poem concluded there, testifying to the inspiration of his lyrics.

When the man replied, "no", Shri Gusainji told his disciples to complete the "seva" and he returned to his residence on the bottom of the hill. When all the Vaishnavas came to see Shri Gusainji, he did not pass a word with anyone until Govindadas reached there and questioned, "What is wrong?"

"Nothing," his guru replied.

Govindadas persisted, "Something must be wrong. Tell me."

Shri Gusainji finally explained, "One of Shri Nathji's garments is ripped and I don't know what sin has occurred for that to have happened."

Govindadas laughed, "Don't you know your Lord's nature? When you were about to enter the temple this afternoon, Shri Nathji jumped down from a tree and one of his clothes caught on a branch and ripped off."

Taking Shri Gusainji's arm, Govindadas told him, "I will show you," and both proceeded to Shyam Dak where Shri Gusainji saw part of Shri Nathji's garment hanging on a branch which he retrieved with his own hand. He then returned to the Apsara lake where he bathed and then climbed up the Govardhana Hill to sew the ripped portion of the cloth back upon Shri Nathji's garment. That evening, Shri Gusainji told all the Vaishnavas, "We should think of a solution so that Shri Nathji is not troubled to hurry back to the temple when the 'seva' is about to commence."

After considering for a while, the guru concluded, "From now on, we should sound the conch three times, wait a bit, and then open the temple door. This will allow the Lord time to return to the temple."¹

GOVINDADAS THE HORSE

Govindadas used to play like a horse while Shri Nathji would mount him. One day, while Shri Nathji was riding on

1. This is still the custom in Shri Nathji's temple and other places of worship in India and is done before Shri Krishna is awakened in the morning and before the afternoon services are to be performed.

his back, Govindadas passed water as he was walking. At that time, a Vaishnava saw Govindadas and asked him what he was doing but Govindadas did not reply and went on his way carrying Shri Nathji. Later, that Vaishnava told Shri Gusainji about what Govindadas had done. When the poet arrived there, Shri Gusainji questioned him what he had done. Govindadas replied, "Do horses ever sit and pass water? That Vaishnava did not realize that Shri Nathji was riding on my back. At that time, how could I have sat and passed water?"

The Vaishnava then bowed to Shri Gusainji and exclaimed, "Blessed is Govindadas."

EARLY LUNCHING

Another time, some Vaishnava complained to Shri Gusainji, "Govindadas takes 'prashad' before the morning 'seva' is completed."

When Shri Gusainji asked Govindadas about that, the poet replied, "I am under His control. As soon as the morning 'seva' is completed, Shri Nathji comes and says, "Govindadas, let's go and play'. For this reason I eat before everyone else in the temple."

But Shri Gusainji insisted that he take his meals at the same time as everyone else.

The following day, Govindadas took 'prashad' after the morning 'seva' was completed while Shri Nathji waited for him to come. When Govindadas finally arrived, Shri Nathji questioned, "What took you so long? Three times I have come here looking for you."

"I normally take 'prashad' early, but yesterday Shri Gusainji told me to wait until your 'seva' is completed to eat."

Shri Nathji did not say anything; mounted Govindadas, and rode out into the forest. That afternoon, when Shri Gusainji entered the temple, Shri Nathji told him, "Because you ordered Govindadas to take 'prashad' after the 'seva', I had to wait quite a while before we could go and play in the forest. Tell Govindadas that he should take "prashad" as he used to,"

After Shri Gusainji made an offering, climbed down the hill and called Govindadas, smiled and said to him, "Take 'prashad' as you were accustomed."

BHAIRAVI RAGA

One morning, Govindadas was singing the Bhairavi raga in a spectacular way by the Yamunaji river when a Muslim passed by there and said, "Your Bhairavi raga is really great."

Govindadas thought, "Because that Muslim has praised that raga, it is no longer fit to be sung before Shri Nathji."

From that day, Govindadas never sang any songs in that raga.¹

GOVINDADAS'S TURBAN

Govindadas tied his turban exquisitely. One day, on his way from Mahavan to Gokul, a Braja Vasi grabbed his turban from his head. Govindadas warned him, "Fool, care well! That turban has sixteen different pieces. Tomorrow morning I'm coming to your home to retrieve it."

The Braja Vasi then bowed at Govindadas's feet and returned his turban.

GOKULNATHJI LISTENS TO GOVINDADAS

Gokulnathji used to go daily to listen to Govindadas before joining his father for lunch. He stationed a man nearby to tell him exactly when Shri Gusainji was ready to take his meals. One day, that man forgot to inform Gokulnathji and when Shri Gusainji noticed his sons's absence, he mentioned, "Gokulnathji is listening to Govindadas by the Mahavan village."

1. Govindadas felt only Shri Nathji should enjoy his singing. The fact that the Muslim took pleasure in his raga made it in his mind unfit to be offered to the Lord.

A man then ran and called Gokulnathji for his meals. Because Govindadas was a great singer, Gokulnathji used to go and hear him.¹

KESHORAY'S TEMPLE

One hot summer day, Govindadas accompanied Shri Gusainji to have the sight of the temple Shri Keshoraya (a form of Krishna). Seeing the deities adorned with abundant ornaments laden with heavy gold and silver laced garments, Govindadas felt sorry for the Lord and asked Him, "Are you feeling alright?"

Upon leaving the temple, Shri Gusainji told Govindadas, "You should not talk like that."

Govindadas replied, "When they adorn the Lord so heavily during this scorching heat, what else can I say to Him?"

Shri Gusainji silently acknowledged Govindadas and smiled.²

1. In Tansen's 'varta' the greatness of Govindadas's singing ability is revealed. Tansen was Emperor Akbar's court singer. Once he performed in front of Shri Gusainji. After the recital, Shri Gusainji offered him five hundred rupees and put a sea shell on top of the money. When Tansen asked what was the meaning of the shell, Shri Gusainji explained, "I have given you five hundred rupees because you are Akbar's court singer, but, compared to my Govindadas, your singing is worth a shell. Tansen then learned singing from Govindadas after becoming Shri Gusainji's disciple.
2. Because Keshoraya's temple was not under Shri Gusainji's supervision, the worship there was performed according to strict Vedic rule, while the 'seva' Shri Gusainji performed was grounded in Shri Krishna's pleasure. For example, in Vedic practice, the deities are bathed in cold water twelve months a year, while Shri Nathji is bathed in warm water. In worship governed by law, deity worship is considered to be a means to an end, God realization, while in the 'seva' Shri Gusainji performed, Krishna's Worship was a means as well as an end, for he is serving God Himself. Because Govindadas was accustomed to the very aesthetic worship of Shri Nathji, he asked Keshoraya if he was feeling well, for he knew how Krishna should be served.

GOVINDADAS'S DAUGHTER

Another time, Govindadas's daughter came from Antari to see her father, but Govindadas did not even talk to her. Kambai, Govindadas's sister, mentioned to him, "You haven't said a word to your daughter."

"I have one heart. Shall I attach it to her or to Shri Nathji?" Govindadas replied.

Some days later, before his daughter was to leave, Shri Gusainji's daughters and daughters-in-law gave her a 'sari', bangles, and a petticoat. After she left, Govindadas asked Kambai if his daughter was given anything. When he heard that Shri Gusainji's family had presented her with gifts, he immediately ran after her and demanded that she return everything.¹

Govindadas received his guru's full grace.²

1. It is a tradition in India that one should not take anything from the guru or his family.
2. As Shri Gusainji was about to leave his body, he took Govindadas by the arm and they both walked into a cave on the Govardhana Hill by the Sundar Shilaji in Jatipura and rejoined Krishna's eternal 'lila'. The place where they entered the hill is commemorated to this day.

